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JACK'S COURTSHIP:

*A SAILOR'S YARN OF LOVE AND
SHIPWRECK.*

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE 'LADY MAUD,'" "A SEA QUEEN," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE & RIVINGTON,
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

1884.

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LONDON :

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

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JACK'S COURTSHIP.



CHAPTER I.

AN OCEAN INCIDENT.

SHORTLY before we took the south-east trades, and we were then in about six degrees south of the equator, there befell us one of those things which the sea, who is the mother of surprises, is always plentifully offering to those who furrow her broad bosom. Fine weather and pleasant breezes had accompanied us down to that point, and sometimes we were swarming along with stunsails out on either side and sometimes with the yards braced sharp up and the bowlines taut as fiddle-strings, but always nevertheless managing to lie our course, whilst ever night found the southern constellations creeping higher and higher. But one morning there came a change, and arriving on deck after breakfast I found the ship in as thick a bank of

white vapour as ever rolled down and obscured the sea. Forward the vessel was clean out of sight in it: what there was of her in that way was just a shadow like a darkish reflection upon a cloud of steam; and this shadow came oozing out of the smother as it might be, until, abreast of the mainmast it broke into the reality of the ship, with the black shrouds vanishing in it a few yards above the shear-poles, and the mainmast shooting into it and looking to be broken short off on a line where the rigging vanished, whilst the mainyard was a dim black streak from which the great sail came down grey out of the faintness till the clews of it were clear things along with the foot stretched transversely from sheet to tack above the bulwarks.

There was a breeze of wind blowing, though you would have dreamt of a dead calm in such a featherbed as that. As nothing was visible above the maintop I couldn't tell what sail the ship was under; but there were enough fakes in the coil of the main royal halliards to make me guess the yard that rope belonged to was hoisted; and apparently therefore we were driving along through this white night under all plain sail. I put my head over the side where the visible water stretched perhaps a dozen fathoms wide, and watching the foam-feathers passing in the space of gleaming steel,—for the fog gave what was to be seen of the

sea that colour,—judged our rate of speed to be about five-and-a-half knots. The ocean was smooth, with an easterly swell that came swinging along out of the thickness on our beam, so that the water rounded up on a sudden whenever you looked and drew down into a hollow in the same way, making a strangeness of the familiar things owing to the liquid gambolling being to the vision limited to a sphere that was not more than half the width of any one fold. When you looked aft from the break of the poop, the helmsman was a smudge on the white blinding obscurity. It was like being in a vapour bath for the temperature ; nothing unpleasant to the feeling of the flesh, but a rare confusion to the eye, and a sort of bewilderment to the ear too, for the noise of the wind blowing into the stretched canvas was aloft, but you couldn't see what was producing it, and the cool sound of little breaking surges running on top of the swell was all around, though not a glimpse of the water was to be got unless you put your head over the rail and looked right down.

Daniel I had descried abreast of the weather spanker-vang smoking a cigar when I came through the companion, and the second mate, who had charge of the watch, kept a look out from the head of the poop-ladder. I joined my friend and exclaimed, " Here's a smother ! how long has this been on us ? "

"Two hours," he replied.

"Nothing in sight before it drew up, I hope?"

"Nothing," he answered. "Let that console you as a passenger."

"I ask as a passenger," said I. "I have knocked off the sea and am now afraid of danger. That's a sign I'm getting old, Daniel. Have you got a light in your pocket?"

He handed me his cigar, which I ruined by thrusting the red end of it into my pipe. "Confound you!" he exclaimed, chucking it away and lighting another: "there goes sixpenn'orth of lovely Havannah tobacco. Where's your sweetheart, Jack? Man, you should show her this fog. D'ye know there's a deal to behold in things you can't see?"

"I'm hoping she'll come on deck, but I don't think I ought to fetch her," I replied. "Mustn't act aggressively, you know; mustn't do anything to cause dear Damaris to put her foot down; though upon my word I really have nothing to complain of. She's conferred abounding privileges upon me, all things considered. I believed her to be an old Tartar, and so she is, for she behaved as one at Clifton, where she took Miss Florence under her protection, and stuck to her skirts to keep off that villain Jack Seymour. How Mr. Egerton has made his way so promptly and successfully with her beats my time. It ought to make me mighty

conceited, for there must be something about me—some charm, eh, Daniel—call it if you please the union of high breeding with a singularly handsome count——”

“Hallo!” bawled the trumpet notes of Captain Jackson, who forked up through the companion at that moment. “What’s this, captain? A fog?”

“Yes, a dense fog,” replied Thompson.

The navy man stepped up to us, peered at the compass, cast a glance aloft, and looked into the windward mist that seemed to be boiling as it blew along in whirling impervious clouds. “I suppose, captain,” said he, “you are pretty sure of nothing being in the road to plump into hereabouts?”

“Oh, sure enough,” answered Daniel quietly, who always somehow managed to fend off the marine patronage Captain Jackson tried from time to time to bestow upon him, without being in the least degree marked in his method of doing so.

“What’s our pace?” said Captain Jackson, going to the side and looking over. “Five-and-a-half or six, I should say. Humph! fast walking for a blind ship, captain.”

“Oh, the faster we sail, the sooner we shall get clear of this thickness,” answered Daniel.

“The devil of a fog of this density is,” said Captain Jackson, talking as if he were hailing the forecastle, “that it makes a look-out of no use. There’s no seeing what’s ahead until you’re into

it. I remember, many years ago, when smothered up in this fashion in the Gulf of Guinea in H.M.S. *Diver*, Cape Palmas bearing nor'-nor'-west, and a trifle of wind blowing that sent us ratching along at about three-and-a-half to four mile an hour, the first lieutenant, who, by the way, was a son of the Earl of Worthing, as fine a seaman—— ”

But at that moment I caught sight of Florence standing in the companion-way, and left Captain Jackson and his yarn to join her.

“ Come along,” said I, putting my pipe in my pocket and giving her my hand ; “ there is nothing in this fog to harm you.”

She stepped on to the deck, looking with wonder at the fragment of ship that was visible, at the masts vanishing under the tops, and at the figure of the second mate, who, though he stood near the break of the poop, was little more than a smudge even at that distance.

“ Am I the only lady on deck ? ” she asked.

“ Yes, but what does that matter ? No fear of Aunt Damaris emerging, I suppose, darling ? ”

“ Not the slightest. But the denseness of the fog is not imagined in the cuddy. How extraordinarily white and light it is, Jack ! It might be steam.”

“ That’s because there’s a blue sky over it and a tropical sun pouring full into it. Take my arm, will you ? I shan’t let you remain long enough to get damp.”

A fog ashore is nothing: it comes down and stands against the windows, white or brown or yellow, and you might as well sit with the blinds pulled down for all the wonder that's to be found in the vapoury envelopment. But on the ocean such a fog as this we were sailing through is something that comes very near to being a phenomenon, owing to the strange picture it makes of the ship and the glimpse of water it enables you to catch. I took Florence to the break of the poop, and when she looked behind her, Captain Jackson and Daniel, and the man at the wheel were scarcely perceptible outlines in the folds of steam which boiled along abaft the mizzenmast. Forward we could just make out the galley and the shadow of the fore-castle-front, melting into the soft cobweb-like blankness. Between was the great mainhatch, the mainmast gleaming against the grey space of sail, with a few 'tween-deck passengers moving about in a kind of blind way and staring aloft for a sight of the familiar canvas of which not a fragment could be seen above the foot of the topsails unless you accepted a little darkening in the fog up there for it.

"Is it not dangerous to be sailing through this mist?" said my darling, speaking low, as though there were something in this thick, steamy environment that subdued her.

"Not in this great ocean," said I. "It would be

another matter in the English Channel. But here you have open sea for thousands of miles ; besides, Thompson told me there was nothing in sight when the fog came up two or three hours since."

She drew me to the lee rail to watch the passing water. The gleam of it had the appearance of ice with snowflakes whirling along its slippery surface. The swell lifted out of the blankness and seemed to heave up the fog as though it were a tangible thing, a solid substance ; but when the vessel lay down again to the breeze after the weather-roll, the vapour thickened down again into the hollow, and the contrast of its whiteness lying against the gloom of the trough made the water over the side look thirty or forty feet beneath us.

We were bending together thus over the side watching the snow-like froth seething and eddying past, and listening to the hissing of the cutwater ripping through the swell in the thickness ahead, when all on a sudden, and in a manner that made the thing appear to us like the coinage of our fancy, there leapt out of the white dense folds abreast of the lee forerigging, and at a distance of about fifteen feet from the ship's side, an open boat with two men seated on the thwarts, and the figure of a third man, apparently dead, lying in her bottom. Confounding to the senses as such a sudden apparition as this was, I could not have mastered every point of the object more completely

had I had half-an-hour's time given to me to inspect her. She was apparently a small vessel's quarter-boat, painted blue, with white sternsheets and thwarts. The two living men in her were dressed in shirts and dungaree trousers, one in a Scotch cap, the other bareheaded; the fellow at the bottom looked just a dark streaming suit of clothes with the hair plastered over his eyes. The man in the Scotch cap seeing us, cried out, "For God's sake, heave to and save us!" And the white, passionately appealing faces of the poor fellows looking up, gleamed for a breath betwixt the opening in the vapour as we shot by, and then boat and men vanished like a pricked soap-bubble.

Nobody had heard the despairful shout save Florence and I. In an instant I bounded aft to the binnacle and took the bearings of the boat, and then at the top of my voice I shouted to Thompson, "We have just passed a ship's quarter-boat adrift with three men in her. She'll bear north by west at this moment!" There was no occasion to say more: besides, the news came from a man who Daniel would well know was not likely to be mistaken in making such a report. An order was bawled along the deck, the helm was put down, the watch came rushing aft, apparently not knowing what was the matter, and fancying, maybe, that somebody had tumbled overboard, and amid a stamping of feet and the cheeping of truss and

parrel and block, the main topsail was laid to the mast, and the ship brought to a stand.

There had been no loss of time over this job, and the boat was therefore bound to be well within half-a-mile distant from us. As to groping for her, why, if we did not sink her by running over her, there were a thousand chances in favour of our missing and losing her outright by reaching: * so we could not do better than lie to and wait for the weather to clear. Thompson sung out to an apprentice to fetch his speaking-trumpet, and then jumping on to the rail, he called to me, "How do you say she'll bear?"

"About north by west," I answered, very nearly adding the regular routine "sir," so strong was the old professional habit when directly challenged in this way. He pointed his trumpet down into that quarter and roared through it, "Boat ahoy!" We strained our ears against the white blankness. The sound of the weltering of the hidden waters came out of the fog dimly and strangely along with the gurgling, sobbing, sloppy wash alongside, and down from aloft floated the straining noise of gear and the creak of a spar and the pattering of reef-points. It was scarcely reasonable to hope that the hail would be answered; the boat would be too far off and the wind in the teeth of the fellow who answered. But to hail was the right thing to

* Or beating. Reaching or ratching is sailing close to the wind.

do as an experiment; and not the faintest echo of a human voice penetrating up to us through the dense vapour, Daniel raised his trumpet again and bawled, "Boat ahoy! we've hove to for you. Save your drift as much as possible; we'll pick you up when it clears." And springing on to the deck he exclaimed, "There! if they've heard me, it'll comfort them; if not, they're no worse off. They can't be very far distant, and we're bound to have them when this boiling is blown away."

"They'll have heard you plain enough," said I; "I'll warrant that. They're not many ships-lengths off."

By this time, as you may suppose, mates, everybody from the forecastle to the stern cabins had bundled on deck to learn what the commotion signified. From where I stood right aft I could just make out the lee poop-ladder and bulwarks near it black with people all staring into the fog, some of them being halfway up the main rigging. If the ship looked strange before, she made a wild sight now with that crowd glooming through the fog and the forward decks so wholly obscured that the vessel seemed to end at the mainmast where the steerage and 'tween-deck passengers and crew had congregated. We who belonged aft stood in a lump near the wheel, the ladies firing off whole broadsides of questions, the greater portion of which Captain Jackson took upon himself to answer.

Aunt Damaris, holding a pocket-handkerchief to her mouth, removing it only to speak, instantly spied me and hauled alongside, and then Florence joined us.

"What is the matter, Mr. Egerton?" cried the old lady.

"Your niece and I just sighted a boat containing three men. She is out there somewhere," said I, pointing into the dense white cloud.

"A boat containing three men!" she exclaimed; "how could you sight her? It's impossible to see a yard!" I explained. "Oh dear me! And they glided past—one dead, you think? How terrible!" she cried. "Why, gracious goodness! what a suffocating part of the ocean the captain appears to have steered us into. I never heard of such a thing as a fog in this part of the sea. Do you think, Mr. Egerton, we're actually in the place we're supposed to be in? But how should you know? Captain," she called out to Daniel, "it's very strange to meet with such a dreadful fog as this *here*, isn't it? We did not encounter anything of this kind in coming to England, and never before, either in coming or going, have I been in such a mist in the tropics."

"It'll be clearing off presently, Miss Hawke," said Daniel.

"They're common enough hereabouts and everywhere else," trumpeted Captain Jackson, addressing

nobody in particular : "there's nothing to be afraid of—specially now that we're hove to."

"Fire!" cried Daniel; and I perceived Mr. Thornton aiming a rifle into the air. He had brought it from below whilst I had been talking to Aunt Damaris, and when Daniel sung out "fire!" the mate pulled the trigger. The smart report was followed by several squeals from the ladies; Aunt Damaris, indeed, who like most of the others had not noticed the weapon in Mr. Thornton's hand, absolutely yelled, and catching hold of my arm, clung tightly. "That signal repeated every five minutes will enable them to keep in our neighbourhood," exclaimed Daniel coolly, taking the cries which had followed the explosion for granted, and hardly guessing perhaps, that he would have acted politely in requesting the ladies to look out for it.

"Is that horrid gun going to be let off again, Mr. Egerton?" cried Aunt Damaris, in a terrified voice.

"Every five minutes, just to comfort those poor fellows out there," said I.

"I hate firing," she exclaimed; "first to be suffocated and then to be stunned. I'll go downstairs again, Mr. Egerton." I conveyed her in the politest manner to the companion, and then returned to Florence.

If my darling had not a sailor's heart, she had a

sailor's sympathy with Jack, and understood his anguish just as she understood his pleasures, as only a woman can who loves sailors for the noble calling they created and perpetuate. You'd have understood what I mean had you heard her making conjectures to me about the poor fellows we had seen. Why, to the others it was a sort of horror without any clear meaning: a boat adrift with three men in it, one perhaps dead, and that was all. But Florence thought of it as I did—as any other seaman in that ship would—without even a hint from me either. For how many days and nights might they not have been tossing about in that little boat? They might be dying of famine and thirst. If that was a dead man in the bottom of the tiny craft, who could imagine the sum of the agonies that had made a corpse of him at last? “Oh, Jack, will it not have broken their hearts to see this ship vanish? I shall go to my death-bed seeing those dreadful white faces! It was like a shocking dream, to be looking at the water and then see that little freight of human misery sweep by. Are we sure to rescue them, Jack?”

“I hope so—I think so—indeed I am sure. They had oars, and may try to head this way when they hear that gun fired.”

“It is too dreadful to think of them, starving perhaps and dying, alone out there in that fearful blank—one cannot realize what they are feeling—

and yet one can imagine their heart-breaking expectation, their prayer to God for succour as they look into this blinding fog."

Mr. Thornton fired a second time. The other ladies took care to back some distance away, but Florence stood close with me, eagerly striving to pierce the obscurity, and exclaiming, "Will they be able to hear it, Jack? Can nothing more be done?"

Never, boys, had my heart gone so close to hers as then whilst I watched her glistening eyes, the beautiful touching anxiety in the trembling of her lips, the sweet contraction of her white brows, her forward-leaning, listening posture, as though by the sheer power of her true, tender womanly soul that was with those lonely, blinded, hidden sailors, she would draw their boat within the sphere of our vision.

We had been lying hove-to in this fashion for about twenty minutes while Mr. Thornton let fly his rifle at intervals, pulling the cartridges out of his side pocket as though they were sugar-plums in a bag there, when on a sudden the thickness in the very quarter we were all peering into thinned away down into a kind of bluish shining, as though the light off the sea was working through; it was but a wide flaw indeed, but as it hung for a few minutes, it gave us a sight of the boat about two hundred fathoms distant: she showed on the brow of a

swell, with her oars over and her head our way, though somewhat to windward of us. The man in the after part of her was rowing fisherman-fashion, that is to say, standing up with his face looking forward: he saw us, and tossed one hand up, whilst we all pressed forward to shout and gesticulate to encourage them to persevere; and nothing in all my life ever sounded more strangely to my ears than the roar the people who were grouped upon the bulwarks sent up when they saw the boat; it swelled up like a great moan, and the complaining of it came down out of the hidden steady canvas aloft. But the abominable fog boiled up again betwixt the boat and us, and all that could be done now was for Mr. Thornton to go on firing, whilst Daniel from time to time hailed the gleaming smother with his speaking-trumpet.

Thrice had he thus hailed, when there came a faint reply, apparently right astern. Captain Jackson and Thompson Tucker, the skipper, chief mate, and I, now all united our voices in a prodigious shout, which I reckon was as far reaching as the report of the rifle; but not being able to see, we couldn't tell the poor fellows how to head, nor durst we bawl a single direction, preferring rather to leave their guidance to God; for they might pass the ship within fifty feet and not see her, and if once they took to groping without certainty of our whereabouts, then, if the fog

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didn't clear away soon, they might be out of sight when the horizon showed, and as lost to us as if they were at the bottom of the water. Upon my word, there was positive torture in our expectation, and we shouted, and fired, and listened, as if *we* were the people who were in peril: till suddenly Florence cried, "There's the boat!" and pointed with passionate eagerness over the taffrail to a spot of shadow low down among the blowing steam.

"There she is!" I shouted; and "There she is!" bawled Daniel. And putting his two hands to his mouth, "Hurrah, my lads!" he roared; "you'll fetch us now—you'll be seeing us plainly enough now!" And Mr. Thornton sprang on to the taffrail with a coil of rope ready to fling to them. It was painful to watch the lift and fall of those two oars, the utter exhaustion, the bitter dying strife for life, they somehow illustrated. In a few minutes she was close. "Look out for the end of this line!" shouted the chief mate. And he chucked the coil fair over the foremost man, who twisted himself to get hold of it, took a turn, and then fell in a heap on the body at the bottom. A groan of pity ran along our decks; some of the crew came tumbling aft, and presently the boat was fair alongside and the men lifted out.

I went with the others to the break of the poop to see them got aboard. The fellow who had fallen

was insensible and had to be handed up ; the other had more life in him, but his grasp was too feeble to support him, and he'd have fallen back into the boat if our men had not collared and helped him over the side. To look down at them as I did, you would have thought them the right kind of sea-apparition to come out of that blinding white smoke upon the water. Had they been ten days drifting about, their faces couldn't have showed more hollow and gauntly yellow, and one of the three being seemingly dead, gave the last finishing touch of horror to the whole thing. They were taken forward, the doctor following in their wake, and for some time we lost sight of them. But there was the boat to watch, as the line that held her was slackened, and she was veered astern ; and whilst the mainyard was swung and way got on the ship, I found myself among those who stared at her as though a little open boat was so rare a thing that a hundred pounds would not be too much to pay for the sight of it. But where there has been human suffering, the theatre of it, though it be but an old plank, takes a kind of mystery and awe that's pure magic of itself ; and deep it is in our nature, since you find it universal, though we may wonder at and ridicule it ? Vulgar it may be, when it comes to giving a guinea for an inch of the rope that strangled a malefactor ; but the fascination is more genteel when you find it on you in the gloom

of a dungeon that has echoed the groans of a martyr, or on a piece of soil that was once an ashen-grey with the embers and burnt skin and bones of some mild and harmless creature whose sin was that he believed in God as he found Him in the Bible. We had imagination to help us—I can answer, at least, for my sweetheart and myself; for not yet knowing the truth, we fancied the worst, and put the whole spirit of it into that boat, till it became the emblem of the anguish we pictured, and horribly fascinating in consequence.

“What’s the story of those men, d’ye suppose, captain?” says the navy man to Daniel, who stood at my elbow.

“Impossible to guess; but we shall hear presently,” answered Daniel.

“I don’t see any sign of a breaker in the boat—there’s no locker, and there’s no food,” says Captain Jackson.

“Oh, Captain Thompson, *do* you think the two poor men are dead?” cried Mrs. Marmaduke Mortimer.

“I’m afraid one is—drowned he looked to me,” replied Daniel.

“How could he be drowned if he’s in the boat, captain?” asked Mrs. O’Brien.

“By falling overboard,” answered Captain Jackson.

“Hang these incidents!” cried Mr. Thompson

Tucker. "They make one's flesh creep. Hope they don't forebode trouble to us, that's all. Hang me if I'm fond of stumbling over corpses, as it might be. It's ill-luck, they say."

"Oh, Marmaduke," murmured Mrs. Mortimer, putting her hand into her husband's arm.

"No use terrifying the ladies, young gentleman," says Captain Jackson, sternly.

"Quite right, sir," replied Mr. Thompson Tucker, briskly; "and I hope nothing may happen that *will* terrify them."

Here Mr. Griffiths arrived, and we all gathered round him to hear his report. "Well, doctor?" says Thompson.

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Griffiths, "one man's dead, the other two are alive, and likely to go on living."

"What's their story?"

"Why," said the doctor, half turning to grope with his eyes along the leeward thickness, "they belong to a small brig which can't be far off." Here Captain Jackson started, and looked sternly aloft and then over the side, in manifest deprecation of our rate of sailing under the circumstances. "A man fell overboard, it seems," continued the doctor, "and a boat was lowered with two men and the mate to pick him up. I suppose they're not very active or smart in those small vessels, and the consequence was, the man was a tidy distance

astern before the boat was got into the water. All this while the poor fellow was swimming strongly ; but when they were within a few strokes of him, he went down. On seeing this, the mate jumped out of the boat after him, but whether he had miscalculated his strength, or something had gone wrong with him, he sank a minute or two after he had made the plunge. The men in the boat went to the spot where he had vanished, and saw him hanging about a foot under the surface, with his arms stretched forward and his legs in a running posture ; one leaned over, caught him by the hair, and dragged him in ; but he was dead. Well, the man who told me this says, that when he now looked round for his vessel, he spied her some distance to windward, and behind her the sky was coming along in a white wall. It swallowed her up, then reached to them, and there they were," says the doctor, "lost in this dense mist with a dead shipmate at their feet, until we slid past 'em so close that another few feet would have settled their business."

"Dear, dear, what a shocking story !" cried Mrs. Marmaduke Mortimer, clinging to her husband and shivering, though, God knows, the beastly fog was like a warm bath.

"It's what I thought," said the navy man ; "I could have sworn that boat had been lowered to pick up a man. Where's the brig, I wonder ? I

hope we may not run into her." And he glowered past us into the obscurity that lay beyond the main rigging.

Daniel gave Mr. Thornton some directions, and presently the mainsail was hauled up and the royal and topgallant halliards let go; some fore-and-aft canvas was also taken in, and the ship, under the diminished pressure, drove along very slowly. I took this to signify that Daniel wanted to sight the brig when the weather cleared, in order to restore the men; and this, indeed, was his motive for shortening sail. Captain Jackson, however, appeared to arrive at another conclusion, and smirked around him as if he would have us know that he did not yet despair of teaching these "merchant fellows" discretion as well as seamanship.

Most of the passengers now went below, amongst them Florence, for there was moisture enough in the smothering vapour to damp those who lingered too long in it; but shortly before noon, to the delight of Thompson, who had despaired of getting sights, the fog fined away to windward, shimmering like silver dust as the clear blue water opened out under it with a glancing and feathering of little surges, and presently you could see the ocean-line rounding like a semicircle formed by a pair of compasses into the impenetrable white ahead and to leeward and astern. The sun flashed down hot

and blinding out of the space of violet vault disclosed by the settling away of the body of vapour, until presently the ship swam out of the denseness into the blazing silver of the meridian effulgence, with her light sails idly flapping in the breeze, and her black yards and yellow masts and grey decks sparkling like frost with the clustering dew-drops upon them from the vapour, whilst to leeward the fog, like steam boiling up out of the sea, stood solid upon the surface of the water, the gleaming white folds of it looking so dense that one wondered, in gazing, how one's lungs could have respired in such a suffocation of cloud; there it hung, slowly withdrawing, the swell running into it with a wet sheen in the slant of every heave, and disappearing at the point of contact; and the appearance of the ocean at that moment was not to be likened to any imaginable thing; why, the deep blue coming out from the summit of that precipitous mass of vapour, and bending over our mastheads to the brilliant weather horizon, and the glorious azure of the deep sparkling up from the wake of the sun to the base of that immense length of lustrous white opacity, were made by *it* more like a dreaming fancy of sea under sunshine than the real thing.

No sooner had the sun appeared than the passengers returned, Aunt Damaris and Florence leading the way, whilst Daniel and Mr. Thornton hovered on either side the quarter-boat, sextant in

hand, on the look-out for eight bells. Scarcely had the southernmost end of the fog-bank drawn down so as to start, as it might be, on the horizon from where the fore-rigging intersected the water-line, than some one forward bawled out, "Sail ho!" and looking we spied a vessel between three and four miles distant, leaning over close-hauled on the port tack, heading our way, her canvas showing yellow against the thickness past her. By this time Daniel had made it noon, and eight bells had been struck.

"What is she—what's her rig, can you make out?" he called to the second mate, who was working at the sail with a telescope.

"I fancy she's a brig, sir," was the answer. "Yes, that's what she is—you may see the trysail rounding close against the lee leech of the mainsail as she luffs—it'll be too close to the mainsail to be a spanker, sir," and he handed the glass to Mr. Thornton.

"If that be so," said Daniel, "then it's a hundred to one that she's the owner of the quarter-boat we're towing, and seeking her."

The helm was put over, and a signal hoisted at the gaff-end: upon my word I forget the exact nature of it: those were the days of Marryatt's Code, you see; but it meant that we desired to communicate with the brig. She seemed to look further off as the fog astern of her drew down to the sea-line

and broadened the space of gleaming blue water between. She made no response to our signal, and indeed it was quite likely she didn't understand it, for if a little vessel like that had a flag-locker at all aboard, it was odds if it held more than a large and a small ensign, and so there would be no good in the skipper having a signal-book. But a proof that she was the vessel Daniel took her to be came presently in the shape of her putting her helm hard down, shooting out as she rounded on her keel into the appearance of a very pretty little brig, with lofty well-stayed masts, a trysail-boom that went far over her stern, a bold sheer forward, white figure-head, and green sides low in the water. She braced round her foreyards, but kept the main topsail to the mast, and thus hove to, she rose and sank upon the swell, a toy-like object, beautifully clear and distinct against the fading white of the background, the sun bringing flashes out of her wet green hull as she rolled, whilst every shroud and stay which her canvas left exposed was as sharply black in the searching meridian light as strokes with a pen on white paper.

"She has sighted her boat astern of us," said Daniel; "that's more intelligible to her than our flags;" and he then gave instructions for the men to be sent aft. Meanwhile everybody aboard the *Strathmore* was looking at the brig

towards which we were slowly advancing. To sight a sail, to speak a vessel at sea during a long voyage, is always a kind of excitement, a welcome break; it is a friendly nod, a passing handshake, that somehow seems to help one along the lonely weltering road; and the mighty stage of the deep ceases for a spell to be the vast solitude which every morning the dawn has revealed and every evening the darkness has obscured. But there was a special interest attached to this meeting: for the little brig was a mother seeking her lost children, whom we had found and were about to restore, and the swing of her mainsail and topsail as she pitched, along with the tremor of her jibs, whose sheets were flowed or well eased-off, made her look to be in a kind of flutter, as if like a thing of instinct her heart hammered hard inside her.

The two rescued living men came along the deck, the one that had swooned away holding on to the other's arm; they mounted the poop slowly, and came to a stand, staring awkwardly at the passengers, he that wore the Scotch cap holding it in his hand.

"Poor fellows!" moaned Aunt Damaris in my ear; "how shocking they look."

But this appearance in them, to a large extent, was the effect of her imagination. Their faces were indeed haggard, as a result of the three or four hours of agonizing expectation they had

undergone; but they looked worse than they were, first because, in a manner of speaking, they had been for awhile abandoned to what would have proved a fearful death, and they were pitiful for that; and next because they were only half-clothed, and what they wore was little better than old rags stitched together, and this, with their wild hair and shaggy chins, and the startled rolling of their eyes, made them an impressive contrast for the dresses and colours of the ladies and the smart apparel of us gentlemen.

"Is that your vessel?" said Daniel, pointing. The fellow in the Scotch cap said "Yes," putting his hand to his forehead and looking at the brig under it. "I've heard your story from the doctor," continued Daniel. "D'ye feel better, men?"

"*I'm* right enough, thank you, sir," says the man, "but my mate here's a bit shook."

"How long had you been knocking about in the fog when we picked you up?"

"Why, the man we went to save fell overboard soon arter seven bells in the morning watch were struck, and we was in the water within ten minutes, or may be less, than that of the time he fell."

"Well, call it three hours and a half," said Daniel. "That's no great stretch. What caused your mate to give up and tumble down in a faint?"

"Sure I can't tell, sir," exclaimed the poor fellow referred to, speaking for himself. There was

a deal to prey upon the mind—not only the thick-ness all round, that might ha' lasted, for all we was to know, until the brig had drifted too fur to give us a chance, but there was the drowned mate in the bottom of the boat, sir, and nothen else to see—nothen else to look at," he added, feebly, with a convulsive drawing in of the breath, and a wild glance at the water.

"What's the name of the brig?"

"The *Wanderer*, sir."

"From where?"

"Callao."

"Oh, then you're homeward bound," says Daniel, smiling. "D'ye think you can manage to put yourselves aboard? We'll draw as near as we can?"

"Oh yes, sir," answered the owner of the Scotch cap; "there's no weight in the boat."

"Step this way for a minute." They followed him, and he and Mr. Thornton spoke to them in a quiet voice. "Ladies," said Daniel, returning, "we have a duty to perform which some of you might not care to witness. It is simply this," he exclaimed in his blunt way; "we propose to put the body of the mate in the boat, and so restore it to the brig. If you'll step aft, you'll see nothing."

Mr. and Mrs. Marmaduke instantly walked hurriedly off; and they were followed by the rest of the ladies, Aunt Damaris thrusting her hand under

Florence's arm and making her hasten. It is true that most of them had seen the body lifted over the side, but *then* nobody knew that the man was dead. Thompson Tucker hung in the wind for a spell, and seemed irresolute, suspended betwixt curiosity and fear. At last saying aloud, "After all a dead body makes a devilish unpleasant memory," he thrust his hands into his pockets and sauntered, with the air of a man unconscious of what he was doing, to a part of the poop whence the maindeck was invisible. Presently, looking aft, I saw Florence beckoning. I went to her and noticed she had her purse in her hand.

"I want you to give this to the poor men," said she, and she handed me a sovereign.

"How much has my niece given you, Mr. Egerton?" inquired Aunt Damaris.

"A pound," said I.

She put her hand in her pocket and extracted a half sovereign: "There, Mr. Egerton, please give them that. I'm not so rich as my niece."

Thereupon the others began to fumble, and Mrs. O'Brien produced five shillings, Mrs. Joyce the like sum, and Mr. Marmaduke Mortimer ten, five from him and five from his wife, Mrs. Grant furnished half-a-crown, and as I took the money to the captain to give to the men I slipped five shillings into the amount.

"Here, Daniel," said I, "this is the passengers'

gift to the two men ; but note, if you please, that it was Miss Florence Hawke who started the subscription."

"Have you given anything?" asked he.

"Yes," said I.

"Oh, hang you! then I must. How much did you give?"

"Five shillings," I answered.

"Too much for a shipmaster," said he; "can't afford more than half-a-crown. And so, Jack, when you next say your prayers, remember that you're more virtuous than Daniel Thompson to the extent of two-and-sixpence."

The two men were on the maindeck, but he called them up again to give them the money, and I noticed the hearty alacrity with which Captain Jackson, when he saw what was going on, whipped out with a crown-piece. The money did the poor fellows a world of good. The chink of it put a light in their eyes, and when Daniel told them the bulk of it had come from the ladies, they looked aft and gave a feeble cheer and a long-drawn "God bless you, ladies—God bless you, ladies!"

"It's the ladies who love Jack," said Daniel; "without them where would the sailor find friends? I echo your words, my lads, 'God bless 'em!'"

We had now drawn close enough to the brig to see the heads of her crew watching us over the rail. The fog had vanished; it was all dark blue water

now, down to where the sky touched the circle with a little gathering in the weight of the wind that seemed to deepen the ocean hue. The sails of the brig stood white enough against the azure, every heave sending a hurry of shadow over them, and it was pretty to watch her sliding down the swell beam-wise, until the brow of the gleaming fold that was laced with the wind's soft thrashing, looked to stand above her bulwarks, though the full picture of her would come out in a moment when the liquid acclivity caught her under her green and glimmering bends and hove her up till the sunlight flashed fair into the streak of her dull yellow metal sheathing, and threw it out upon the blue with the complexion of old gold.

When we were within hailing distance the *Strathmore* was brought to the wind, and Daniel standing up bawled, "Brig ahoy!"

A fellow in a suit of grey cloth and a great flapping straw hat on his head, sprang on to the rail, and with a flourish of his hand, answered, "Hallo!"

"Have you lost a boat and three men?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we've picked them up. Look out for them."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Some of our men came along and dragged the boat to the gangway. The maindeck and waist

were full of the second and third class passengers, but you noticed a flurry and a pressing back among them when four of the crew came out of the fore-castle, bearing the dead body of the brig's mate on their shoulders. They had flung a boat's sail, or something of that kind, over the corpse, but you could see his lifeless hands hanging under, and his boots on the shoulders of the two who supported his legs, and I reckon the sight was made more affecting by these indications of what that outline under the canvas was, than had the body been exposed. An apprentice had hauled down the signal at the peak, and had run the ensign half way up. The brig's people didn't seem to understand this until they saw the white thing handed over our side into their boat, and then you perceived their ensign float up off their taffrail and blow out midway like ours—the sailor's symbol of death making one of his ship's company. Sorrowful it was to look over the rail into the boat and see the dead man lying there. He had perished whilst striving to succour a shipmate, and one's heart went to the still seaman for that. There was a little handshaking on the maindeck ere the two men left; but in a few minutes they were in their boat, adrift, dancing upon a tumble that was brisk enough for a little craft, rowing fairly, and heading true for the brig that lay easily to leeward. We waited until she reached the vessel, and it was not

until she was hooked on to the davit-falls that the order was given to trim sail. Then, as the great yards were swung, and the *Strathmore* low-curtsied to the sea like a dancer bowing to an audience ere taking her first graceful leap, the ensign was run to the gaff-end and dipped three times as a token of farewell. The little brig answered the salutation, but with so slow a motion of the flag as to suggest dejection and sorrow to a degree not to be conveyed; there she lay pitching with her maintopsail aback like some living creature stunned and bewildered by bereavement. Fancy it was, of course; but for all that you would have felt it as a fact had you watched her, knowing the dismal message her boat had brought her, and cast your eye upon the huge blue solitude that surrounded her, and then upon the hurrying and trembling shadows in her canvas, and her bows that wept as she lifted them streaming. Does not a vessel mourn the loss of her children? Two of yonder crew had gone to their account that morning; one sadly, one nobly; and as I hung over the poop rail, watching the brig lessening fast as our wake flashed up astern of us, she seemed to me to know her loss and to be grieving. A wide space of water separated us before she braced up her yards and proceeded on her course; and presently she was no more than a speck gleaming white, blandly shining in the airy distance like a star.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE SOUTHERN OCEAN.

WHY have I stopped to spin you this yarn? It has nothing to do with my story. But avast! I think it has. What is this log but the record of a voyage, how it was begun, what happened during it, and how it ended? And that being so, why, as a part of the voyage, our overhauling of the brig's boat in a fog ought to be told. If it's not art, you can't growl, boys; for you know I cautioned you at the beginning against fostering any expectations of that kind. But such a deal remains to be told that we shall never get ashore again if we hang over the side story-spinning in this fashion; so now let us start afresh for a steady spin down the South Atlantic, and then a bold shift of the helm for New Holland.

The day following that on which we met with the brig, we picked up the south-east trades. They blew in half a gale of wind; I had never met them so strong; a maintopgallant sail over a single-reefed

topsail was as much as the *Strathmore* could stagger under ; and for several days her decks were just a white smother as she drove along over the high seas, lee channels out of sight, and the foam sometimes standing up, so that by putting your hand over the rail you could have grasped a handful of the sluicing snow alongside. We swept along close-hauled on the port tack, and that it was which made the wind feel a whole gale. I never should have thought that on a taut bowline the ship, loaded down as she was to her chainplate bolts, would have shown such a pace. Looking at her over the rail, you would have thought her flying clear of the water rather than sailing through it. Grand it was to mark her strike the dark blue rolling comber, shatter it into froth, and rush through the rainbow which arched upon the storm of foam like a girl making a bound with a coloured scarf over her head.

Grand, but uncomfortable ! One would sometimes taste the spray on the wind right aft. The maindeck was impassable by all but the crew ; and how the 'tweendeck passengers made shift to get their meals from the galley I don't know. But you heard no complaints ; everybody was too glad to feel the strong wind, and see the broad wake shining, and rising and falling upon the leaping seas, till it seemed to vanish upon the horizon, to grumble at the discomfort of the cabins and the decks. Every

day at noon Daniel would discover that we were so many degrees nearer the latitude of the Cape, and the passengers began to make bets upon the date on which the *Strathmore* would drop anchor in Sydney Bay. Well, we carried these tempestuous trades as low down as 31° , and the change from the thrilling, and plunging and rushing to a long South Atlantic swell and a west-north-west breeze, with barely enough weight in it to keep the forecourse lifted, was lamented by all.

Now I will here say that, as every parallel we ran down inevitably brought whatever result my voyage was to yield more and more to a head, every degree of latitude the ship chalked out found me increasing my thoughtfulness in the matter of my courtship, and so speculative as often to be abominable company to all but my darling. I knew that in a few days we should be having the sun rising over our bows, and measuring our progress by degrees of longitude; and then, I would think, the next thing will be the loom of the New South Wales coast, the Circular Quay, a lodging in George Street, and afterwards heaven alone could know what.

I never managed to get half-an-hour with Florence without talking to her about this. One fine evening, I remember, she came on deck, and I joined her. The ship was going along quietly, gently rolling upon the deep indigo watery folds, the sky

was clear and brilliant with stars and star-mist, vague streams of milky light, the planets which hung under them burning blue like diamonds, and Magellan's shining clouds and the beautiful Southern Cross among them, the latter sparkling gloriously on the black breast of the night, the fairest of all her radiant jewels, whilst in the east, the moon fresh from the deep was softly soaring. We walked to and fro talking such things as will come into lovers' heads, and presently my darling stopped a moment to look at the moon, and at its ice-like, greenish silver wake, that widened and narrowed as the swell rolled through it.

"She will be rising over our bowsprit before long," said I. "It'll soon be Eastward ho! with us, and then what's to happen?"

"Jack," said she, "I have told you again and again what you ought to do."

"Ay!" said I, "but hang me if I have the courage. I know what will be the result; the moment I tell your aunt that I am Jack Seymour, she'll step between us. No doubt she can't prevent us from being together while we're in the ship; but what will she do when she gets ashore? Not certainly that she could do anything that *you* didn't choose; but you *won't* choose, Florence; you'll not marry without your papa's consent, you say?"

"You know I would not, Jack; how can you suppose that I should?" she interrupted, smiling,

with the moonlight on her face, and her eyes gleaming like the most beautiful of the stars over us.

"Then, that being so," said I, "what's the good of my going to Aunt Damaris and telling her who I am? She allows me as Jack Egerton to be with you, to make love to you—she cultivates me; at all events there's no objection; why should I put a stop to all this, Florence, by confessing who I am, when you have determined not to marry me without your papa's consent? If you'd only say, 'Jack, you shall be my husband, whether papa and Aunt Damaris like it or not; I will marry you—fairly, if they consent, but if not, secretly, for marry you I will,' why, my very own, if you'd only say that to me and mean it, why, d'ye see, Florence, I'd go below at once, knock on your aunt's door, and say, "'I'm Jack Seymour, Miss Hawke, the fellow your brother objects to.'"

"I'll say nothing of the kind," she exclaimed. "Oh, Jack! you are not a nice boy for even making me think of such a thing."

"Then," cried I, with a kind of groan in my voice, "what's the good of my confessing to your aunt?"

"But she'll have to know the truth sooner or later," said Florence.

"Yes," said I, "but if it's to bring her between us, if it's to find you willing to obey her as your papa's representative, I don't want it to be sooner

but later. Don't forget, Florence, that you have as good as said that if your aunt were to discover who I am and to command you not to speak to me or to have anything to do with me when we arrive at Sydney, you would have to obey her."

"No, Jack; I said I should not know what to do; I should go home—I should—— Oh, dear! how bad-tempered you are with me!" she cried.

"Bad-tempered!" I exclaimed, and I said no more till we came to a part of the deck where there lay a deep shadow, and there I kissed her, and held her to my heart; for in what better way could I answer her? She never objected to my kissing her now. It wasn't right, no doubt, nor even consistent, seeing how staunchly she held out for her papa's consent. But then, boys, she was fond of me, ay, she was fond of me; and betwixt a kiss and the altar, you know, there's a wide stretch of ground. Presently I was hammering away again at the old topic.

"The truth *must* come out sooner or later, as you say," I observed; "but anyhow, I'll keep my secret till we're ashore; she shan't hear of it on blue water. If she likes me as Jack Egerton, if she don't object to my falling in love with you in that character, then let her introduce me as Jack Egerton to her friends, let her allow us to be recognized by all Sydney as sweethearts, and *then*, when I avow myself, maybe her pride'll come to

our help, she'll feel herself committed, Florence. That's one of my ideas, but I don't say it's worth much," I added, gloomily. "It's a fearful struggle, it's all up-hill; you're not against me, but you don't give me a hand."

"How can you say such a thing?"

"If you won't marry me without your father's consent, and if you are, as I am, perfectly positive that he never *will* consent, then I say you're not giving me a hand."

"You may think what you like of me, Jack," said she, sadly, "but I never will marry you without papa's consent."

Here fell a gloomy silence; then I felt her hand that was under my arm creeping along, till it touched my fingers.

"Don't be cross with me, Jack."

"My darling——"

"You are *so* impatient. May not we hope one day to get papa's consent? If he finds us truly devoted and constant——"

"Oh!" cried I, "don't make that a question of it. Devoted and constant!" and off I yawned into another bout of passionate talk of which I'll not weary you, lads, with the particulars. "But," said I, winding up, "I have no hope of ever getting his consent. He wants blood, Florence. Thank God, I am not without blood, but it's not of the kind he desires."

“Yes, but Jack,” said she, very gravely, “he may find me resolved; and though I never, never could marry you against his consent—I won’t say his wishes—he may find me very determined.”

“Determined to do what?” I asked, in a hollow whisper.

“Determined to wait for his consent,” she answered. I uttered a groan. “You foolish fellow!” she exclaimed, playing with my hand; “you don’t understand. Do you think papa an ogre, a dreadful unbending man? I am sure, Jack, if he were to find me determined to wait for his consent, he would give it, because my determination would signify that I meant to marry nobody but you, and you are really not such a dreadful character as to make his consent hopeless when he finds that years do not change us, and that I am unhappy without—without——” The rest was dissolved in a sigh.

Oh, it was too sweet to hear her, despite of her talking of years. A brief interval of transport on my side ensued; and then I said, “If, as Jack Egerton, I have made your aunt like me, and think me—ought I to say it?—not ineligible for her niece, am I to suppose that the mere pronouncing of my real name is to convert me into a vulgar, unfit sailor youth in her opinion?”

“No!” she exclaimed, eagerly; “and that is why I think you should let me tell her who you are.”

But I would not have this. I told her I disliked the idea, not only because a confession would bring her aunt between us and make the rest of the voyage horribly uncomfortable for all three of us, but it might end in causing the old lady to detest and abominate me; for the story was sure to get wind. One would ask questions, then another, until by-and-by everybody would be hearing that the young man whom Miss Damaris Hawke had made a friend of, and whose attentions to her niece she appeared to be silently encouraging, was no more nor less than the youth whose admiration and devotion the young lady had been sent away to Australia to escape. "And," said I, "as you may be sure Captain Jackson wouldn't spare her, and as her sensitiveness would put plenty of uncomfortable meaning into every look and whisper and smile in the others, she would hold me accountable; the rest of the voyage would be little better than a long skulking and hiding on her part; and she would step ashore with you, hating and execrating me."

Well, my pet listened attentively, and in the end had nothing to answer. It was always so in these talks. She wanted me to throw off my disguise, not caring twopence for what the passengers might think, concerned only in her conscience, which she felt would be clearer if her aunt knew who I was; and then I would reason with her, always managing

to produce some fresh argument against the admission she desired, until she'd own that perhaps I knew best. I cannot imagine that any lover before my time was ever situated as I was. Long ago my uncle had told me not to flatter myself for a moment that Florence was a girl likely to elope with a man, or marry without her father's consent. He had a clear eye for character, and had proved right. But I had not taken his view when I started on this voyage. In my heart my belief was that before the Australian coast was hove up, I should have got my pet to love me well enough to consent to any form of marriage, that is if her father proved stubborn. Well, I had succeeded in making her love me, ay, to any extent beyond my highest hopes; did I not know *that* by a thousand signs which I could no more explain to you in writing than I could fling the white silver of the moon on a written description of that luminary? And yet here she was, as immovable in the matter of her papa's consent as ever she was at Clifton. What then was I to do? At times it would come into my head that my only chance lay in going on steadily improving Aunt Damaris's liking of me as Mr. Egerton, allowing her to write about me as Mr. Egerton to her brother, and then, when she had fairly posted her packet of praise, divulging my secret, and trusting to her acceptance of Jack Seymour as a very good substitute for the same

person under another name. Assuredly, she was permitting me to make love to her niece aboard the *Strathmore*. I don't mean to say that she could have helped this love job, even had she objected to it; she couldn't be always chasing Florence on deck, she couldn't afford to render herself an object of laughter by stepping up and sundering us when she found us together; but she could, had she chosen, have told Florence not to allow me to pay her such marked attention as she noticed, and in a heap of other ways could she have indicated her objection, had she felt any, even though Florence had defied her, and insisted upon being with me and acting as she pleased. But nothing of the kind happened. She seemed to blind herself to what was going on. If she spoke of me at all to Florence, it was to praise me—so at least my darling would say; and to my face, she was as gracious as her acidulated nature would suffer her to be, often taking my arm on deck, often sitting next me at meals, despatching me on little errands, such as for her fan, her smelling-bottle and the like, in a manner to let me understand that she honoured me thus because I was a favourite of hers, because I was what, perhaps, behind my back, she would speak of as a nice young man; frequently in her conversation with me developing a vein of sentiment that might have been alarming but for her tacit recognition

of my love for her niece, whilst on several occasions she'd express the hope that I would often visit them on our arrival in Sydney.

I repeat that mine was a most perplexing situation ; and spite of my frequent chats with Florence and a hundred long and lonely meditations, I never could arrive at any other conclusion than that there was nothing to be done but to let things take their chance, and that meanwhile I could not do better than maintain the character under which I had shipped, and by all the artifices of which Mr. John Egerton was capable, prepare the way for Mr. Jack Seymour.

Well, boys, this was the state of my affairs as we drove round the Cape before half a gale of wind, and ploughed a west by south course into the Southern Ocean. We were now in the second week of December, and in longitude 21° east, when a strong nor'wester reefed us down, and for ten days blew us along to an accompaniment of frequent and heavy squalls of wet, at the rate of two hundred miles in every twenty-four hours. I am not exact in calling it a nor'wester, for it veered betwixt due north and due west, blowing hardest when it came most westerly. But for ten days it drove us, to the joy of Daniel, who now calculated upon bringing his passage from the English Channel to the Sydney Heads within the time the run had occupied him last voyage.

It was what Mrs. Marmaduke Mortimer would have called a stormy time. The tallest surges in the world run off the Cape, and they'd look like cliffs sometimes, I would think, as I'd stand watching them chasing us on the weather quarter, thundering their avalanches of snow from their mountainous heads into the dark, wrinkled, roaring valleys between. As wild a sea scene as ever I witnessed happened upon one of the nights of these ten days I am talking about, when the small green moon in the north was flying like a meteor through the sweeping smoke of the sooty scud that shot out of the blackness in the north-west. She flung wet silver gleams down as though they were sparkling lances darted by some hurling hand up there: like arrows they seemed to fall through the rents in the masses of torn and sweeping vapour, making bits of the frothing heads in the fair wake of the orb flash out in a manner to startle the eye gazing from the middle of the stormy scene; it would have passed for a constant flaring of torches burning white and extinguished by the breath of the gale as fast as they were kindled. Never a star was to be noticed, nothing with a gleam in all the howling dingy paleness overhead save the moon, that would blaze out bright for a second, then vanish in the snuff-like black smother of the scud, or show faint behind a thinner body of vapour, the very ghost of herself, cutting—as

she would seem—with incredible velocity through the filmy stuff, till, with a leap, out she would sparkle glorious, with a hurl of her metallic light down upon the mad sea, and then a dive into a dense cloud big enough to wrap the whole ocean in shadow, though for a space you'd see the moonlight rushing off the water upon the lee bow, as though it were being blown away by the gale.

But in about longitude 40° east, the strong wind died out in a squall, leaving us to meditate upon the several thousands of miles of ocean that still rolled betwixt us and Australia. Then for a space of eight days we had a spell of grand weather, variable breezes ranging aft from either bow, but never forward, sometimes blowing weakly, sometimes a merry wind, but always managing to make true Pacific weather of it for us; a soft, heavy blue in the sky that looked to cave in like the hollow of a sail between the great white clouds, and a long, shining, azure swell that made one feel, as it hove up the ship with a slanting rush, as if it were a motion of the deep created by the revolution of the globe, so rhythmic was the sweep of it, so measureless the deep blue distance out of which it came.

It was weather to enjoy to the fullest, a gush of delight coming from God knows where, making the air so sweet that the taste of it was in your mouth when you went below, lingering like the flavour of

new milk ; and the wonder of it seemed to go into the ocean too, for never did I see so heavenly a blue upon salt water ; the sunlight floated off it like a mist, and I'd fancy at times when the ship sank into a hollow that I could see the sky of the horizon betwixt the azure of the water and the radiance hovering over it, just as the violet gleams between the arched foot of a sail and the yard beneath. But then you get all sorts of atmospheric miracles in that Southern Ocean,—evenings which come along molten with pink, and green, and crystal points of light ; sunsets which cause the sea to appear as if it were streaming away in a mighty channel of gold into the huge, flaming, crimson, rayless disk that slowly sinks behind it ; a kind of drawing up of the deep into the shadow when the night falls as if it were a surface of black velvet inflated from underneath between your ship and the ocean-line, shot with cloudy puffs of phosphoric radiance which the swell lifts to the stars over the horizon as though it was by contact with *them* that these mysterious luminous swarmings were fed.

One was glad of such weather for the sake of the 'tweendeck passengers. The children's enjoyment of it did one's heart good to witness. They made a playground of the waist, and listening to them sometimes, with a look round at the mighty deep which went away on all sides for thousands

of leagues, westwards to the bitter Horn and northwards to the broiling Indian Ocean, I'd find something startling in the thought of such little laughter and childish calling voices sounding amid the hugest scene of creation in the world. Ashore such fancies could not come ; houses intercept the view, or there are hills for a boundary. The horizon lies close, any way ; but at sea, when your glance goes past the water-line it dives straight into the sky that hangs over the same liquid expanse hundreds of miles off. The hollow sails would throw back the echo of these children's voices at times when there was a hush up aloft ; and with those notes there'd blend the swift chattering rattle of women, the humming of arguing men, the call of the boatswain to the seamen at work on the rigging, with the sound of gushing water over the sides, the tune of a plane making music on the carpenter's bench, the mutterings of hens in their coops, and the clanking links of chains working in sheaves or striking the spars. Aft, we were staid enough ; ever since the day on which little Lily Joyce had fallen overboard, the children of that family had been kept snug under the lee of the nurse or their parents ; if ever even one of them made a stride out of arm's reach, you'd see the nurse jump for it or the mother would give a screech. One fall overboard was enough for that affectionate circle, and their care was very reason-

able; but I'd often pity the nurse, who needed eyes in her back as well as in her face, and grappling hooks in each hand to keep those youngsters together; whilst life to Mr. and Mrs. Joyce, when they and the children were on deck, was little better than a burden. Well, you'd see this family all of a cluster near the skylight; and beyond them Captain Jackson lying back with his arms folded drowsily, looking at the sea from under his hat, the brim of it leaning to his nose; Mrs. Jackson near him knitting; Mrs. and Miss Grant reading; Mrs. O'Brien talking to Thompson Tucker, who looked bored as he listened; Daniel standing up before Aunt Damaris and Florence, with his grinning red face turned upon the old lady as she'd jerk out her observations with the old pecking motion of her face that made the cavern of a hood the most natural covering for her sharp nose to show in and out of; right at the extreme end the man at the wheel, gripping the spokes and munching a quid as though he were talking to the card or the canvas, betwixt which his eyes would alternate; and then for a frame you had the soft sweeping girdle of the blue sky, shining purely against the glossy round of the spanker and between the staysails, and flowing up over the bulwarks till it dazzled into the white splendour of the sunlight over the port maintopgallant yardarm. This would be the sort of picture the poop offered

during those few lovely days, during which the ship sailed fast under a cloud of canvas and impelled by gushing breezes, bonitos showing the way and the albacore in our wake, with a following of sea-fowl stooping over the white track that poured in a sparkling eddy from the rudder-post.

During one of these halcyon days I remember I was talking to Aunt Damaris and Florence, when we were startled by a shout from the forecabin. Looking, we spied the people running to the side to peer over; we all three got up and went to the rail, and there in the water close under the ship we saw a dead sailor on a lifebuoy. It was the ugliest, saddest thing chance could have fitted into the gleaming airy beauty of that day. How long it had been in the water could not be imagined; you just caught sight of the putrid featureless face as the sway of the sea made the figure, poised on the buoy, bow horribly to us as it slid astern. An albatross in our wake stooped to it with a scream that might have been wrung from the corpse itself, so wild was the sudden note heard in connection with *that* sight, and then came on again after us.

“What a tomb for that one man!” exclaimed Florence to me, shuddering.

“Better than a graveyard,” said I. “There are no rank weeds here, no crumbling monuments, no hint of the things which make death dreadful to our imagination. What nobler sepulchre than this

glorious blue sea could a sailor want? Every surge that breaks gives him a headstone."

"Why do people make one see such sights?" grumbled Aunt Damaris, looking pale and scared. "How the creatures stare! I would have given ten pounds not to have had my attention called to the horrible object."

"What a story of human anguish is contained in that life-buoy!" cried Florence, clasping her hands.

"There never was a politer body!" sung out Mr. Thompson Tucker from the rail. "Did you see him bow to us, ladies, as we passed?"

"For shame! for shame!" exclaimed Mrs. O'Brien. "How do you know there's not a mother waiting for him at home?"

"He didn't look as if he ever had a mother," retorted Mr. Tucker.

"Oh, you wicked creature," cried Mrs. O'Brien. "How would you look afther you'd be dthrowned a week?"

"That youth must be an infidel," said Aunt Damaris.

"Infidel or not," said I, "I'll wager in a time of danger he'd be the first to drop on his knees and shriek out a thousand promises of being good for ever after if he's only spared this once;" for hang me, boys, if I liked the chap's derision of the poor dead sailor.

Well, the passing of that dead man reminds me of another incident of this fine weather bout in the Southern Ocean. This time it was the forenoon, a slight breeze was blowing over our starboard quarter, and the ship was sailing along quietly with every stunsail she carried on one side of her overhanging the water. I was smoking a pipe on the grating abaft the wheel, underneath which the tiller-chains led; a favourite spot of mine, for every heave of the bows would favour me with a sight of the whole length of the ship, and I was never weary of watching the effects of light and shade produced by the vessel's motion, the darkening of the hollows of the canvas as the sails swept out, the clear white of them next the bolt-ropes when they rounded their breasts to the sun, and the crystalline gleam of the cloths curved sharp against the deep blue of the sky, then the swaying of the lace-work of shadow cast by the rigging upon the deck, and the gush of sunshine 'twixt the yards and the sails making the masts look as if they were fished with silver bands. A hundred such things there were to keep me admiring, though it happened just then that instead of watching the ship I was following with my eyes the square short figure of my friend Daniel, who with Mrs. Marmaduke Mortimer on his arm, was stumping the weather side of the poop. My mind fell back to the old memories he

belonged to, and I thought how wonderfully small is this world, that of the thousand shipmasters at sea, the one I was destined to sail with in the wild romantic undertaking that was carrying me to Australia should turn out to be an old shipmate and friend. Little enough have I said of his seaman-ship and of his professional conduct; but I had seen plenty to enable me to judge that he was in the highest degree worthy of the position that he had attained,—the command of a fine Australian liner which, think what you please, is, let me tell you, a mighty responsible post, and more so in those days than now when most of the work is done by steamers. No one would have supposed to hear him joking with me, or talking drolly and yet with the perfect simplicity of a seaman too, to the passengers, what a vigilant soul that little red-faced chap carried under his skin, what an eye for the weather was his, how thorough his knowledge of sailors' characters which furnished him with a wonderful mastery over his crew, how true was the understanding betwixt him and his mates, though the dignity of his position as master was never more stubbornly asserted by a man's behaviour and more fully appreciated by those under him.

I was following him with my eyes and thinking of him in this manner when one of the apprentices, who was aloft on some job in the mizzentopmast-

crosstrees, hailed the deck. Mr. Thornton, who was in charge, looked up. "There's something black in the water away out yonder on the port bow, sir!" cried the youngster. "It appears like the hull of a capsized ship."

Everybody crossed the deck to take a squint at the thing, whatever it might be. Perceiving nothing, I dived below for my little telescope, knowing that between Daniel and the chief mate and the others there was small chance of my getting the loan of the ship's glass, and levelled it at the sea over the port bow. In a moment the long blue swell hove up a black, wet, gleaming object into the circumference of the lenses.

"What do you make of it, captain?" said I.

"Why," answered Daniel, talking with his eye at the glass, "it appears to me to be a ship upside down."

"That's what I think," said I. "And a big ship too."

"Let's have a look," exclaimed the navy man, and he put himself into a kind of cocked-hat and lord-high-admiral posture as he pointed the glass.

Florence joined us, and I held my telescope for her to look through; but, of course, she could see nothing. Somehow or other girls never do see anything when they look through a telescope. They don't seem to know how to shut one eye and keep the other open. How's that now? It's

vulgar to wink, of course; but most girls can do that by trying (of course they never do); and yet they can't shut one eye to look through a telescope! Florence managed it by putting her hand over one of her sweet sparklers; and I watched the long lashes of the other trembling against the brass rim of the telescope and her lovely face, matchless for complexion, full of earnestness as she poured the light of her left eye into the tube; but it was no good: "It seems all sky," said she; so I handed the glass to Thompson Tucker, who got it out of focus and sung out "Why, hang me, there's a fog coming on!"

"No more horrors, I hope?" said Aunt Damaris, joining us.

"There's a fog coming on," said Thompson Tucker.

"A fog in your eye," exclaimed Captain Jackson: "it's the hull of a thousand-ton ship cap-sized, ma'am. Another sample of stevedoring, captain. The art of stowing is lost. They load iron rails on bird-cages and wonder that ships go a-missing."

"Whatever it is we'll have a look at it," said Daniel; and he told the chief mate to keep the shi away by a couple of points.

By-and-by Mr. Thornton said to me, "If that's a ship she must have been built as a man-of-war for the King of the Cannibal Islands; for look your

hardest, Mr. Egerton, and you'll see no shape in her."

"Well," exclaimed Daniel, coming up to us, "what does it look like now?"

"I'll tell you what it *looks* like," I replied, working away with the glass; "it looks like a thousand-ton slaver, floating on her bilge with a hundred or two of negroes swimming around her. But what it *is*," said I, handing him the glass, "is this: it's a tremendous dead whale, horribly swelled, with a thousand mollemokes, or birds of that pattern, eating it."

And so it proved by evidence as strong as the eyes, I mean the nose. One mouthful of the taint was enough, and the ship was hastily brought as far to windward of her course as she could come without touching the braces in order to give the putrescent mountain a wide berth. What sort of a whale it was I couldn't tell you; maybe it was what the Yankee whalesman called a crinkum-crankum whale, the meaning of which is "A whale that can't be cotched;" but whatever the right name for it was, I tell you, lads, it looked to me the biggest thing in whales that the sea had ever floated. I'll not be minute; if I were to be graphic you'd shout for eau-de-Cologne. There it swung upon the azure folds of the swell, such a corpse that the mind was awed and oppressed by the immensity of It. It floated high, owing to

its condition, and in places the overlapping of the water made the skin gleam like a mirror for the sun to flash in. It was a fearful carcase and looked like an island, and yet not half of it was exposed. You saw no head and no tail; the portion visible was from the hump to the flapper or fin abaft the lower jaw!

“Gracious mercy!” mumbled Aunt Damaris behind her pocket-handkerchief, “what an object it would make on a beach!”

That’s how one should have seen it no doubt, to understand the amazing magnitude of this dead and oh! most evil-smelling leviathan. How could the chaste moon rise upon such a loathsome mass? One might have sworn it was enough to pollute the gales and breezes of the whole of the Southern Ocean, ay, from the Cape of Good Hope to Van Diemen’s Land, and from the Antarctic Circle to the Equator. And the next wonder was the birds upon it. We slid past too far off to make sure of them, but if they were not mollemokes they were not albatrosses—no, those kingly eagles of the southern seas, let me hope, would disdain such stupendously loathsome fare; they were great brown birds with long bills, and powerful wings sweeping out and around so as to resemble the prongs of a pitchfork. How many of them there were I could not tell you; they swarmed upon the huge dead block, some rising high on the wing and

swooping down with a rush as though to spear the black rind with their bills, while scores floated in the water round.

"Are they ducks?" asked Mrs. Marmaduke Mortimer.

"More like carrion-crows, love," observed her husband.

"Ducks'll eat snails and muck," said Mr. Thompson Tucker; "but hang me if I think an honest land-duck could be got to taste that whale."

"And that's the thing people make umbrellas of, and stays?" exclaimed Mrs. O'Brien, in the tone of a person upon whom a great truth dawns.

"The strangest part is how we're doomed to meet nothing but horrors," said Aunt Damaris, walking off.

CHAPTER III.

COLLISION.

ON Christmas Day it was calculated at noon, by dead reckoning, that our latitude was about thirty-six degrees twenty-three miles south, and our longitude about seventy-six degrees twenty miles east. Dead reckoning is finding out a ship's position by counting up the number of miles she has run in a given time as shown by the log, and by marking off her courses on a chart; and this had to be done on that Christmas Day, for it came with a thick, leaden sky and a raw southerly wind. It was the unpleasantest touch of weather we had encountered for weeks. A sluggish swell rolled up against our lee-bow like the heavings of an ocean of green paint, and this combined with the run of the surges with the wind rendered the movement of the ship exceedingly confused and uncomfortable. There was no rain, though all round the sea there stood a haze that might well have passed for the grey colouring of a heavy downpour there. The

Strathmore leaned before the fresh wind under whole topsails and fore and maintopgallant sails, and the yards being braced in a little she was sailing fast, though the bow swell bothered her and caused her at times to fling out a furious play of foam on either hand. There might have been ice to windward, with such an edge in it did the wind come; and we all appeared in warm clothes as though we were making the passage of the Horn.

Despite the gloomy sky and the bleak and sullen appearance of the sea, we went to work to look cheerful, toiling like true Britons as we were, to seem happy because it was Christmas Day. But what pleased us more than the arrival of the twenty-fifth of December was the perception that a little more than three weeks of such progress as we were making would be giving us a sight of Sydney Town. The hope made me as glad as any of the rest. I wanted the voyage to end. I had achieved all that was possible: had won my pet's love, had made Aunt Damaris like me, and there was nothing more to be done on the sea. I wished to be ashore, to be playing my part there as Jack Seymour, ultimately, maybe, to escort Florence back to England and force her father's hand, partly by his sister's backing me and partly by my long identification with his daughter. Anyway, happen what might, I had had enough of the ocean for the time being, and I remember the

pleasure I felt when I reflected that I had quitted the life for good, and that, unlike my friend Daniel, I need never approach salt-water again when this voyage was over.

What sort of merrymaking the 'tweendeck folks had I can't say; in the way of cheer I reckon the festival to them did not go very much beyond a few plums to spot their brown duff with. And the forecastle, as I might be sure of, would fare no better. Are there land-goers still flourishing who fancy that on Christmas Day, Mercantile Jack at sea enjoys life? Wonderful it is where people get their notions of the nautical calling from. I have known a writer to send a sailor on to the jibboom to furl it: but even that touch doesn't come near to the extravagant fancies people have of Jack's life when he's afloat; how his calling is made up of dancing, singing, smoking and drinking; how on Saturday nights he pledges his sweethearts and wives (of whom he has a score) in large cans of rum-punch, fragrant with lemon and screeching hot; how on Christmas Day he decorates his hammock with holly, says grace over a sirloin of beef, and sends to the captain for a *petit verre* of cognac just to stave off indigestion after three platefuls of rich black plum-pudding. Well, there may be ships afloat where the sailor is so served; but if they have owners you may bet they are the people who hold shares in the *Flying Dutchman*.

Christmas rations ! I'll tell you my experience ; a tin of yellow water such as you'd get by dropping a bucket into the Thames abreast of the Isle of Dogs, boiled till it steams and served out under the title of pea-soup because of a few pale shot dropped into it, harder than lead to the jaws ; next a lump of greasy, rancid pork, smelling like—but I durst not seek a comparison for *that* ; and last, a mass of coarse flour worked into dough by the help of the same sort of slush that they grease down with and feed the forecastle lamp with, sprinkled with two penn'orth of raisins for a mess of ten or twelve hungry souls, boiled in a canvas bag, then pitched into a wooden tub and called pudden. Or for pea-soup and pork substitute a hunk of beef so massive that you could not drive a corkscrew into it, so tasteless in all save brine that nothing but the cask it comes from could find it a name ; a piece of meat you could carve into a pipe or a snuff-box, and use ; or work up into a doll's house, or an ornament for a mantelpiece. Then for dessert there are biscuits so full of worms that broken bits of the ship's bread might pass for diseased filberts. Truly we greatest maritime people on the face of the earth treat our sailors nobly. Oh for the privilege of turning the tables for six months only ; of letting the sailor send the shipowner to sea in the forecastle for that time !

In the cuddy on that Christmas Day our dinner-table was embellished with two plum-puddings of large proportions and dark colour. Daniel sat behind one of them, and from the fore-end of the table his face would look like the moon rising over a tumulus. It was black enough outside to make the cuddy a brilliant and delightful shelter. You saw the darkness lying as if it were a tarpaulin upon the skylights, and the muffled moan of the wind and the stifled wash of the sea ran in a grim sound through the chattering of our voices and the chink of plates and glasses.

"I shall be glad to feel Australian ground under my foot," said Captain Jackson; "the voyage to the antipodes is a long business."

"Well, sir," says Daniel, "in another month or so I hope you'll have been long enough ashore to make you forget all about this voyage."

"Oh, it's been a good voyage—very comfortable, I'm sure," said Captain Jackson. "Ship a trifle deep perhaps at the start, but she's risen as she's gone."

"It's queer to think of to-day being Christmas," observed Mr. Thompson Tucker. "Where shall we all be this time a year?"

"I suppose in hot countries there's no such thing as Christmas Day?" said Mrs. O'Brien.

"Depends on the religion of the inhabitants, ma'am," replied Captain Jackson.

“Well to be sure, I should have thought of that,” exclaimed Mrs. O’Brien. “Captain, how uncomfortably the ship rowls.”

“Head swell and a beam sea—a nasty conjunction,” responded Daniel. “But we’re heading true for Balmain, and by listening you should be able presently to hear the locusts humming.”

So the chattering went on, all of us taking a turn at it, even Florence, who was usually very quiet at table, talking briskly. There was a deal of wine-taking, for the custom was in force then; and I had the honour of drinking with Aunt Damaris, who, sitting on the skipper’s right hand, had some difficulty in seeing me; but when she did catch my eye her bow was a handsome one. It was a quarter to eight; dinner was over, but we were lingering at table, cracking nuts and nibbling at the biscuits, and listening to stories told first by one and then another, Captain Jackson’s yarn reminding Mr. Joyce of an anecdote, and Mr. Joyce’s anecdote recalling an incident to somebody else. The cheerful lamplight swung over the table and sparkled bright in glass and silver; you saw the stern-cabin doors in shadow past the mizzenmast, the companion-steps mounting to the deck, the polished bulkheads going down with the lamplight upon them to the cuddy front, where the windows looking on to the maindeck stood in ebony squares. I held my darling’s hand under

the table, and my eyes were on her face as she listened to the story then being told.

At that instant there was a shock as though an earthquake had happened right under the ship. You heard a crash and ripping noise forward ; shouts and screams ; the rending sound of falling spars ; a rush of feet. The ship stopped dead, heeling over, over to leeward till I thought she was capsizing ; some of the passengers lost their balance and fell ; the women shrieked wildly ; a hundred articles rolled off the tables, and the clattering and smashing of plates and wineglasses fearfully increased the confusion. Whether we had driven into St. Paul's or Amsterdam Island, or were in collision with a ship, was not to be guessed in that cuddy. One or the other it was. I believed that the *Strathmore* was going bodily down. She must have heeled over to an angle of fifty degrees, and with Florence half-fainting lying against me (for she was seated on my right, and the frightful reel of the vessel threw her weight upon my arm), I held on to the table with my teeth locked, half-stupefied as the best of us will sometimes be when a frightful disaster happens in a breath, when a calamity falls like a thunder-bolt, and spreads a hundred wild horrors ere a man can cry " Oh ! "

I looked for Daniel, but he had vanished. Down on the deck to leeward against the bulkhead which framed the cabin doors, I saw Captain Jackson

supporting his wife who appeared in a fit; Mr. Joyce, with his hands bleeding, groped in a blind way for the door of the cabin in which his children were sleeping, staggering as he felt along the polished panels in the very posture of a stumbling, staggering skater upon ice; Mrs. Grant sat crouched on the deck amidst a whole raffle of odds and ends which had fallen from the table, shrieking for her daughter, who was seated on the right-hand side of the fore and aft table, and who, with the others there, was rendered absolutely helpless and incapable of stirring by the terrific angle of the deck. There is nothing in language to give you the feeblest idea of the frightful confusion at that moment; the pounding of canvas outside, the heavy scampering of feet, the wild shouts of men, the screams of women, the heavy washing sound of water, the hill-like angle of the deck, the drowning heave of the stricken hull upon the heavy swell and the sharper play of the surges. I could not command my legs, and durst not therefore let go of the table; but in a few moments the ship righted considerably, and gripping Florence round the waist, and feeling in the grasp I took of her that at that minute I had the strength of ten men in me, I was bearing her to the companion steps, when Aunt Damaris shrieked out to me to save her, and fairly leaping from where she stood, caught my left arm in a death-clasp.

The sensation inspired by the motion of the hull was that she was settling down ; and any man would have imagined this to be happening who had felt her sluggish recovery that was like the gradual erection a vessel takes when she founders. Believing this, therefore, I had but one thought : to get Florence on deck, stand by her, and take my chance of life and death with her and at her side. But her aunt's grasp was not to be shaken off ; the tenacity of it was like the clip of a steel hook ; so, as it might be, placing my half-fainting love before me with my right arm circling her waist, I pushed my way up the companion-ladder, dragging Aunt Damaris in my wake, who followed as if she had been a sack.

If I am unable to give you the least idea of the confusion below, what am I to do with the black, howling, thunderous scene into which I emerged with those two women ? The ship, as I might know by the wind blowing over the taffrail, had swung with her head to the nor'rard ; it was as dark as a wolf's throat ; here and there in the sooty shadow you'd see the ghastly glare of foam, flickering up an instant and disappearing ; but, oh ! it was not the blackness that made the horror ; *that* was in the hellish uproar along the poop and upon the maindeck ; the yelling of men, the shrieking of women, the shouts of captain and mates, the bawling of seamen ; there was wreckage aloft, as

you might have known by the pounding up there ; apparently sheets and halliards had been let go fore and aft, and the flying gear flogged the masts and canvas as if a thousand fiends were overhead smiting the spars and sails with thongs in their triumph over the ear-piercing anguish below.

With Florence on one arm and Aunt Damaris's hands locked upon the other, I stood looking from side to side seawards, to discover, if possible, the cause of this disaster, for whether we had struck an iceberg, or a rock, or a ship, or one of those lumping derelicts which encumber the ocean to the frequent destruction of vessels, I could not imagine ; but I could see nothing—not a light, not an outline, not a deeper shadow anywhere to tell me of some object besides ourselves being upon that weltering black surface. I had dragged Florence and her aunt to the rail just abaft the foremost of the two quarter-boats—the *Strathmore* slung two on either hand, and a gig over the stern, and had besides a big long boat stowed forward abaft the galley—and as I stood struggling to pierce the scene before acting, dozens of figures came rushing past us, and there was a mad tumble of two score of them, at least, into the boats ; but there was no sailor among them ; they were evidently steerage and 'tweendeck passengers, they knew nothing of handling the falls or casting the gripes adrift, and I supposed they durst not use their knives for

fear of losing the boats. It was a selfish brutal struggle, as far as I could make out, and all the actors were men; and knowing very well that all the good they could do would be to drown themselves and lose the boats for us, I struggled to free myself from Aunt Damaris.

“Oh, Jack, do not leave me!” shrieked Florence.

“My darling!” I cried, “let me save those boats if I can. Let me find out what has happened. We may not be in immediate danger. Stop where you are—and trust to me—both of you trust to me! Let go of my arm, Miss Hawke! for Christ’s sake let go! I have been a sailor—I may be of service—” and with a wrench I broke away, and sprang into the thick of the nearest of the groups struggling at the boats.

“Men!” I shouted, in a voice to which my excitement lent a volume that I often recall as an incredible sound for my lungs to produce, “the captain says there is no danger! the well has been sounded; the ship is tight. Out of those quarter-boats for your lives! If the gripes give way they’ll capsize and drown every mother’s son of you. Stick to the ship! I tell you she’s as sound as she was when she left London!” and without ado I fell to dragging the fellows off the hen-coops, manhandling them as if I were in the thick of a death-struggle, calling upon those who had sense in

them, who were Englishmen and had the spirit of men, to help me to save the madmen from drowning themselves; and so fiercely did I pull and haul upon the cowards, flinging them back, all the while roaring out that the ship was as tight as a bottle, that some of them believed me and lent me a hand, and presently groups of them were standing at the hen-coops, listening to me swearing that there was no danger, that there were boats and to spare for us all if there *were* danger, that the captain would not suffer a life to be lost if they would be cool, and so on: all urged in the most passionate, shouting, convincing tone; though some still stuck to the boats, cowering down in them as they swung at the davits. There was a hand at the wheel—you just caught the glimmer of his outline in the haze of the binnacle-lamp; and well I recall shrieking to those dastards to LOOK AT HIM! did they think if the ship was sinking that sailor there would be coolly steering her? And this simple thing they seemed to find more reassuring than all my other outcries put together.

By this time I might tell that the others on the maindeck were being pacified or persuaded into some approach to orderliness, though again and again a woman's scream would go shrill up into the blackness, where there seemed to be a storm with the slatting of canvas and the whipping of mutilated gear. There was the shining of lanterns

on the maindeck, and I sprang off the poop; finding right under the break of it an under-steward holding a lamp there, I collared him and ran him up the ladder, bawling, "Bring that light aft! There's a gang of cowards there ready to get the boats over. The light'll give them heart!" and I hurried him to the after-skylight. "There," I cried; "stand you here with that light. Here, my lads," I shouted, addressing the swarm that hovered near the boats, "come and assemble round this light. I tell you the ship's tight—tight as ever she was!" And a number of them came at once and grouped themselves about the lantern, taken by the light as the human eye always is in darkness and in a moment of terror, and perhaps finding a trifle of courage now that the shrieking and yelling had subsided and the ship went on living.

I went away again to the fore end of the poop, and found a man at the head of the poop-ladder. I peered close and said, "Is that you, Daniel?"

"Yes," he answered.

"What report for the cowards aft? I can help you by keeping them in check."

"We have been run into by a big steamer," * he replied, talking fiercely, like a man in a fever; "she has holed us under the starboard bow, and the fore compartment is full of water. If the

* He said it was a steamer; but this was never known. If she showed any lights they were not seen by the look-out or the officer of the watch.—JACK.

bulkhead gives we shall go down like a stone.—
"Mr. Thornton!" he roared to the mate; and I ran to
where I had left my love to tell her what I had heard.

Talk of nightmares! Queer sights I admit are
beheld in ugly dreams, but I should like to know
what wildest phantasy of slumber ever came up to
the vision of that crowd of men hovering around
the lantern on the skylight—one brandishing his
arms in the insanity that had come to him with
his fear, and raving dismal trash about his being
one of the elect of God, and the only man in that
ship sure of going to heaven; three or four of them
on their knees praying; two—brothers maybe—
locked in an embrace; whilst from time to time
one or another would start and run for the main-
deck, perhaps to find the women of his family;
these fellows had forgotten *them*, you'd notice;
they were all men who had rushed to those boats;
whilst others stood with their arms folded, like
persons who reckoned their time had come and
were going to their death lost in thought. Well,
an actor in such a scene as this is not a fit person
to paint it. He'll see but little; the impression is
a mixture of wild horror and hideous clamour, the
rushing of the wind through rigging, the unearthly
sobbing and washing of water, the deep gloom that
puts the ship out of sight past the mainmast, and
the breathless, thrilling, maddening expectation of
the next moment finding him with the salt-water

burning his throat, and the swoon of drowning cold in his brains.

"What is our situation?" cried Aunt Damaris. "Are we sinking, Mr. Egerton?"

"No," I answered, clasping Florence to me; "a steamer has struck us, made a hole in the bow, and filled the fore compartment with water. But the bulkhead that prevents the water flowing into the after portions of the ship is bound to be substantial, and you may be sure there is no immediate danger. Besides, we have thorough seamen in Captain Thompson and his officers. I know by the orders I have caught what they have been doing. You may trust the captain; if he believed the danger immediate he'd give orders for the boats to be cleared—" and I broke off, feeling Florence shivering, to cry, "My God! you are both without covering for your heads! Pray be advised—go to your cabin and warmly clothe yourselves—I will accompany you!"

But Aunt Damaris cried that she would not leave the deck—if she was to be drowned it would be in the open air, not in her cabin; and seeing Florence move as if she meant to go below with me, she seized hold of her and shrieked to her not to leave her alone. Seeing this, I ran as fast as my legs would carry me to the companion and entered their cabin, where, fortunately, a bracket lamp was burning. I overhauled the wearing apparel I

found about the place and picked out Aunt Damaris's bonnet and Florence's hat, along with a cloak, a shawl, and some wraps; and with this armful I returned on deck, noticing as I passed through the cuddy that it was deserted, and most of the cabin doors wide open. I attired the ladies in the things I had brought with me, and whilst I was thus occupied, endeavouring to encourage them by such plain practical talk as a sailor will know how to use at a time like this, the second mate, followed by eight or ten seamen, came along the poop and ordered the 'tweendeck passengers on to the maindeck. They hung in the wind, but the second mate was a blunt-spoken, sinewy fellow, and he had received his orders.

"Away with ye!" he cried, catching up the lantern and swinging it around him; "you'll be no safer here than there, so off you go. Why, you curs! where are the women, that you're all here about the boats without 'em? Off with you now, for you're in the road here;" and he and the sailors beginning to shove and push and show themselves in earnest, the fellows went away towards the maindeck, sullenly and reluctantly enough, as though they supposed the boats were to be kept for the cuddy passengers; the creature who had gone mad, as I took it, springing and dancing as he went, snapping his fingers and flourishing his arms, and hoarsely bawling that

he was one of the elect and that there was nobody to be saved in that ship but himself!

When the poop was cleared, the second mate and the others of the crew immediately applied themselves to seeing the boats ready for lowering. There were some 'tweendeck passengers still skulking in those boats, but so far as I could make out in the darkness they were very roughly and unceremoniously hauled out and trotted forward by the seamen, who were then posted in couples at the four quarter-boats and gig to guard them. Meanwhile I might judge by the grunting and screaming of pigs forward that they were clearing the long-boat ready for hoisting her over the side. Pray God, I thought to myself, that the ship lives till daylight at least; but this making ready with the boats was a terribly ominous sign, and for the life of me I could not forbear a shudder of despair sweeping through me as I reflected on the long hours of darkness which lay before us, and on the consequences of the rush which would take place if the bulkhead that stood betwixt us and eternity yielded to the pressure of the water that filled the fore compartment. Again and again I probed the deep darkness upon the sea in the hope of discovering some sign of the vessel that had run into us. If she were afloat she could not be far off; little more than ten minutes had passed since the blow of her stem had hove the *Strathmore* on to her

beam ends, during which time we could have put but a short distance between her and us had she chosen to remain on the spot; but nothing was to be seen of her, so that, unless she had herself foundered, then most assuredly had she left us to our fate.

When the poop had been cleared of the 'tween-deck people, I caught sight of the cuddy passengers congregated around the companion; it was too dark to see more than the blotch they made upon the shadow, but I knew who those people would be. I proposed that we should join them, and Aunt Damaris consenting, I took Florence by the hand whilst the old lady clung to my left arm, and walked over to the companion. Fourteen of the passengers were assembled here, and though one heard no strong demonstrations of terror or grief, sobs and sighs broke plentifully from the women, and one of the Joyces' little children cried continuously.

"Is that you, Mr. Egerton?" called out Captain Jackson, from the thick of the group.

"Yes," I answered.

"Do you know," cried he, hoarsely, "if the captain or any of his mates mean to tell us what's happened and what we are to expect? *That* duty's his."

"They're full of business," I answered. "Can't you hear them shouting? There's been disorder

as bad as a mutiny among the 'tweendeck people, and the getting them quiet, and ascertaining the nature of the injury and providing for the safety of the ship is as much as we have a right to expect of captain and officers at such a moment as this."

"Do you know what the injury is?" exclaimed Mr. Joyce, speaking out of the gloom beyond the companion in the voice of a man babbling in a dream.

"A steamer has struck us and made a hole under the bow," I replied. "The fore compartment is full of water, but the collision bulkhead stands, and whilst it stands the ship is as safe as she's been at any time of the voyage."

"This comes from the cursed habit of merchantmen neglecting to put their side-lights out when on the high seas," cried Captain Jackson, whose temper rose in proportion as our danger seemed the less urgent.

"Where's the ship that struck us?" said Mr. Griffith, the doctor, shoving himself towards me, and speaking in a voice more like a gasp than a human note: "has she left us?"

"I'm afraid she has," I replied.

"Oh, Mr. Egerton, *do* you think we're in danger?" cried Mrs. Joyce, and the sobbing of the others ceased till I had answered.

"If the bulkhead stands we're *not* in danger," I answered; "if it yields without wholly carrying

away, we have hands enough for the pumps to keep the water under. If the worst comes to the worst, then there are boats enough for all; we are right in the track of ships, and we have honest right, therefore, in any case to consider our safety assured."

"Oh, if you speak the truth, thank God for your words! thank God for your words!" broke out Mrs. Marmaduke Mortimer, in an hysterical cry.

Noticing in the dimness that hung about the companion from the faint haze of light floating up the steps from the illuminated cuddy, that the ladies and children were uncovered, I exhorted the gentlemen to take them below and properly equip them for any term of exposure that might be in store, begging them not to think that the danger would be more urgent because they took care to provide for whatever might happen. Some of them immediately acted on my suggestion. Just then Daniel, from the fore part of the poop, shouted to the man at the wheel to put his helm a-starboard; some hands came running aft and rounded in the main-braces so as to lay the topsail aback. The wind blew fresh and keen from the southward, and the easterly swell came along in a dull roll out of the blackness that made the ship stagger again on the northward-running surges. There was very little noise now in the ship; forward you could hear the boatswain's strong voice direct-

ing some of the crew who were busy with the wreckage that way ; there was a kind of humming, too, down on the maindeck, as of a congregation of people eagerly talking, intermixed with the cries of children and sometimes the high-lifted voices of women ; but the distracting rattling and slatting of canvas and gear aloft had been stilled ; whatever work was doing was being done quietly and systematically, and one felt to a degree not to be expressed the wonderfully soothing influence of the spirit of discipline that had followed fast upon the first terrible confusion and alarm.

No sooner was the ship brought to the wind than a rocket was fired and sent up fair betwixt the main and crossjack yardarms by a man who in the blue glimmer I made out to be the third mate. The ghastly ball of fire shot strong through the wind, and broke at a great height in the deep blackness and sailed in a shower of blue spangles for a moment or two ere vanishing. The humming on the maindeck at the sight of that wild signal swelled up loud, with a groaning throughout the length of the labouring hull as though every timber in the ship were in sympathy with the fear that rushing ball of fire had kindled ; but a few loudly spoken words of command and encouragement from the chief mate, who was either among the people there or on one of the poop ladders, subdued the cries and exclamations. Another

rocket was fired, and then a third. Whilst this last was sweeping upwards the captain came to us. By this time those of the passengers who had gone below had returned, and we made a fair crowd as we stood in the place we had chosen near the companion.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Daniel, in the plain, simple way of a seaman, speaking without a hint of the excitement that had made his voice febrile when he answered my question, "I ask your pardon for not having come to you before. But your lives are concerned in the safety of this ship, and in looking to her first I hope I have served you better than by merely palavering you. You know what has happened?"

"Some blackguard steamer has run into us, backed out and left us," said Captain Jackson.

"That is so," exclaimed Daniel; "but we are testing by those signals whether she has left us. If she be afloat she may return and stand by us. If she has gone down these rockets may enable us to save the lives of her survivors, if any there be, by bringing them to us."

"Will the ship sink, captain?" cried Aunt Damaris.

He answered her as I had; that the ship would float if the collision bulkhead withstood the pressure of the water. A whole volley of questions were then poured into him. What was to

become of them, Mr. Thompson Tucker wanted to know, if the vessel did sink? Mr. Joyce asked if the bulkhead could not be strengthened. Captain Jackson stormed about the neglect in not putting the side lamps over. Indeed, I cannot remember what was said. I can recall Daniel's quiet manner, his hearty encouraging assurances, and that's about all; and my recollection is bright in that particular direction, because of the wonder I felt at the time that a man in charge of a ship that might sink at any moment, burdened with the fearful responsibility of the large number of lives in her, with the long black night before him, and for thousands of miles no nearer land than two little rocks lying dead to windward and as easily to be missed in open boats as an open boat is easily to be missed by a ship,—I say I remember him at that time because of the wonder he excited in me by his perfectly cool and collected manner, his answers made as quietly as if he was seated at the head of his dinner-table, and the wise encouragement he offered the ladies, not idly priming them with hope, yet making them understand that they were in no danger *then*, though peril might come, in which case he was there to deal with it.

Whilst he conversed with us, I took notice that the second mate came along the poop and turned the men who had been stationed to guard the boats to the job of watering and provisioning them. Every

lantern that the ship yielded had been brought on deck to encourage the people and enable the crew to work quickly and without confusion. Some of these lanterns were brought aft, and you saw the men going forward and then coming to the boats again, bearing breakers full of water, tins of preserved meats, bags of ship's bread, and such things. A fourth rocket had been fired, but no response had been made. One looked in vain into the deep gloom made weird here and there, low down, by the gleam of phosphorus or the pallid flash of foam; there was nothing to be seen but the black night stooping in one unbroken, sooty surface to the sea, with the fresh wind sweeping through it, bleak as a March easterly blast, and grim, straining sounds of spars and gear aloft.

"Captain Jackson, Mr. Joyce, gentlemen," exclaimed Daniel, "let me beg of you to hand the ladies below. No good can be done by keeping them in the cold up here. It'll hearten the others on the maindeck, too, to see you sitting quietly in the cuddy. Trust to me, gentlemen and ladies, to give you timely warning should the leak gain upon us. Already your safety is amply provided for."

No one stirred. The wives seemed to cling to their husbands with a tighter hold, and there looked to be a huddling together amongst the whole group of us as though there was a general

recoil from the thought of going below. The lanterns in the men's hands shed a dim light along the deck, and looking round our faces, which showed white enough with the eyes gleaming against the blackness beyond, Daniel caught sight of me.

"Jack Seymour," said he, "you're an old fist, an old shipmate and sailor. *You'll* know we want a clear deck and that it's cruel to keep the ladies here. For God's sake set our friends an example. Miss Hawke," meaning Florence, "let Mr. Seymour take you below—the others will follow you I am sure."

They probably fancied he had forgotten my name when they heard him call me Jack Seymour. But heaven knows it was no moment for wondering. I seized Florence's hand and said to her aunt, "Miss Hawke, the captain is quite right. We're in the road, and as safe below as here. Pray take my arm and accompany me."

She obeyed mechanically, seemingly half stupefied. I led her down the companion steps with Florence's hand in mine, she behind; we entered the cuddy, and I handed them to a sofa at the foot of the ladder. None of the others immediately followed, and I could hear Daniel expostulating and entreating. The cuddy lamps shone as they had at dinner. The deck was still littered with the crockery and stuff that had rolled off the table,

and some of the cabin-doors swung open and banged to with the rolling and heaving of the ship. Maybe it was nothing but fancy, not fit to strike me any way; yet I swear that the feel of the hull under my feet, now that we had a deck over our heads, was a sensation as if the fabric were *settling*, and she never rolled quickly to leeward but that the movement seemed the drowning lurch a ship will take before she puts her bows or her stern into it and goes down to her grave.

I sat between Aunt Damaris and Florence, chafing my darling's hand that was cold as ice, and whispering whatever encouragement it came into my head to offer her, sometimes glancing from her marble-like face, with her eyes bright with consternation, though there was a look gathering about her sweet mouth that showed me her spirit was slowly returning—glancing from her, I say, to the crowd of figures huddled under the break of the poop, many of them fitfully turning to look in at us through the windows and the glazed tops of the cuddy doors, and plainly hearing the bewildered growling of their voices as they feverishly conversed.

Suddenly the old lady said, "Mr. Egerton!"

I looked at her, and she fixed her eyes like a pair of gimlets upon me.

"Is your name Jack Seymour?"

"It is."

“Are you the—the gentleman whose attentions my niece was sent on this voyage to escape?”

“I am,” I replied.

She clasped her hands and drew a deep breath. She was too much confounded to speak. She rolled her eyes wildly over me, and then looked up at the black skylight, and then at me again. You could see the horror of our situation driving through the feelings her discovery had excited like a squall sweeping through and scattering a fog.

“Oh!” she screamed out, as if all these things coming together were too much for her, and affecting her mind, “what have I been reserved for?”

“Miss Hawke,” said I, gently, “this, God knows, is no time for anger, for explanation, for anything more than an earnest prayer that heaven will watch over us and preserve us. I am here because I love your niece, Florence; there was no ocean wide enough to separate me from her.”

“Oh, Florence, Florence!” cried the poor old body, sobbing, though with dry eyes.

“Aunt,” said my darling, “Mr. Seymour joined this ship without my knowledge. But when I knew that he was on board, aunt, I was glad, for I love him—indeed, indeed I love him—oh, never more than now! and I thank God he is by my side!” and she threw her arms round my neck, and wept grievously on my breast.

I kissed her and soothed her, and said to the old lady, "I am not ashamed of what I have done. I would do it again, and again, and again;" and I felt the hot triumphant blood in my face as I held my darling to my heart, and fixed my eyes on Aunt Damaris's face. She eyed me with a look of stupor.

"And you are Mr. Jack Seymour, then—not Egerton! you are Mr. Jack Seymour—*not* Egerton!" was all she could say.

"I had as much right to be here as Mr. Morecombe," I answered, in a low voice.

This put a kind of life in her. She gave a start and cried out, "Don't speak of *him*! why did you not tell me who you were? Oh, Florence! how could you, how *could* you have deceived me so basely!"

My darling lifted her sweet streaming face. "Don't say basely, aunt; don't say basely. He asked me to keep his secret, and I did so because I loved him. Basely, aunt! oh, remember why this voyage was undertaken! Was there no baseness in not telling me that Mr. Morecombe was to join us? And which of the two," she cried, in a victorious tone, that swelled high in her rich voice and smoothed every tremor out of it, "would you rather have with us *now*—this sailor, whom papa cruelly misrepresented to you, or that——?"

"Oh, I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

shrieked out the old lady, vehemently interrupting her niece. "Oh, Mr. Seymour! I could forgive you if you hadn't—— Oh dear, oh dear! what a dreadful situation for me to find myself in!" and she buried her face in her hands and rocked to and fro as if she were in an agony of pain.

CHAPTER IV.

WAITING.

So now the murder was out. Aunt Damaris at last, thanks to Daniel, knew who I was, but it was like confessing on the brink of the grave. What significance had my love-chase, my courtship, my masquerade, in the teeth of the tremendous calamity that had overtaken the *Strathmore*? Whilst Aunt Damaris sat rocking upon the sofa with her face buried, and Florence leaned against me within the embrace of my arm, Mrs. Grant and her daughter, followed by Mr. and Mrs. Joyce, the nurse and children, came below and seated themselves. It made one sorrowful to see those little ones, when the nurse and the parents lifted and hushed them in their arms, looking wonderingly and drowsily around, as if they could not understand why they had been snatched from their beds, and why they were not laid down again.

“You are wise to come below,” I said, addressing Mr. Joyce. “In trouble of this kind, passengers

never can give sailors too clear a deck to run about upon."

"I had no idea that you had been a sailor," responded Mr. Joyce.

"Yes," said I, hanging my head, "I was at sea for some years."

"One should have supposed so from the manner in which you rescued my darling, Mr. Egerton," exclaimed Mrs. Joyce, hugging the child to her, and giving me the name I had sailed under, though this reference to my having been to sea proved they had taken notice of Daniel's exclamation to me, and if so, then of the name he had called me by in his hurry and anxiety.

"If the ship sinks and we are saved by the boats, I suppose all that we have must be left behind us?" said poor old Mrs. Grant, who sat hand in hand with her daughter, speaking with an air of resignation.

"Oh, don't talk of the ship sinking!" cried out Aunt Damaris.

"Not yet, anyway," said I. "Pity it is not the other end of the night. But listen! do you notice there is no clanking sound of pumps? The carpenter, you may be sure, is standing over the well with the sounding-rod, and whilst those pumps are silent, you may know that no water has penetrated the bulkhead, and that the ship remains perfectly safe."

"It does me good to hear you talk," said Aunt Damaris. "I am sure you would not deceive us."

"I would not indeed," I answered.

"How long were you at sea, Mr.—Mr. Seymour?" I told her. "You must know all about it," she exclaimed, edging up to me, so to speak, in her manner.

"I know enough to keep a faithful and vigilant eye on you and your niece's safety, and to place my life at your service, if my life can help you," said I.

She turned her face aside, and said "God bless you!" in a voice that was like that of a woman of eighty.

"If we have to take to the boats they must not separate us, Jack," exclaimed Florence, loud enough for her aunt, but not for the others, to hear. "I could not bear that."

"We'll not speak of the boats yet, my darling," I replied. "We may never need them. If the bulkhead holds, the compartment being full of water will not hinder us from finding our way into Sydney Harbour."

But though I spoke thus, I had small hope. The *Strathmore* was a stoutly-built ship, but though her frames were of iron, the two bulkheads with which she was fitted—one forward and one aft, leaving the hold a long clear space—were of wood, as those fittings usually were in sailing

vessels in those days. These bulkheads were formed of vertical plank tongued and tie-bolted, as it is called, and "chinsed" or very lightly caulked, so that as water-tight divisions they could not be reckoned perfectly trustworthy, though, now and again, they had saved a ship. There was indeed the chance of the pumps being able to keep the ship afloat should the bulkhead *only* leak; but after such a blow as the steamer had dealt us, apparently cutting the starboard bow right down, carrying away spars and jibbooms forward, and causing the ship to heel over as if the colliding vessel would steam right over her, there was no telling the strain to which the bulkhead had been subjected; so that at any moment the weight of water in the fore compartment might, during a heave up of the bows, burst through the bulkhead, flood the hold in a breath, and send the ship, deep in the water as she already was with many hundreds of tons of freight, to the bottom like a stone. This was Daniel's fear, as he had admitted; but my own judgment in this respect hardly needed the confirmation of even his large professional knowledge.

Miserable it was to an eager, restless man like myself, to be sitting in that cuddy, inactive and waiting for something to happen. Yet I was but a passenger; I had been asked to set an example; I could do no good on deck, for there were hands

and to spare for such work as was to be done in the blackness, and haply I could have been more ill-employed than in striving to keep up the spirits of the poor women, and in cherishing and encouraging my darling, who had turned to me in this supreme moment even as a wife might turn to her husband, knowing him her best friend under God. Many a time since, when I have read of collisions, I have recalled that dreadful night and thought that if there is a kind of work in this world into which a man engaged in it should put the full honesty of his soul, knowing that hundreds of lives may depend upon every blow of his hammer, every fair rivet-hole, every sound fastening, it is that of the shipwright. You must go through it to know what it is to be in a ship in a time of disaster, and to feel that betwixt you and the bottomless deep there stands nothing but the labour of an artizan. If that labour be true, if he has toiled upon the fabric feeling always that precious human lives will trust him and face the dangers of the deep in the fruits of his handiwork, then when in calamity his workmanship is found staunch and his fellow-creatures are preserved by it, surely, all-silently, he has achieved a feat that for heroism of conscience raises him among the highest of life-savers. But if, on the other hand, his work is false, and those who trusted themselves to him unquestioning, perish because the acquisition of a

few infamously-earned pounds weighed more with him than the agony of scores of helpless creatures hurried into eternity, then may he understand that there is one sailor at least who denounces him as the vilest of murderers, the most infamous of assassins; and let those titles be worn by any man who is responsible for courting sailors and passengers into a ship which he knows to be ill-built, or ill-formed, or in any way unseaworthy. No, no; this is not too strong, mates; it doesn't tell half; I'm no fist at fine writing; I speak what I think, and what you'd think, had you sat in that cuddy, looked at the women there, at the groups showing in the light through the windows, heard the wash of waters, known the blackness that hung like a shroud outside, realized the frightful immensity of the ebony ocean in which we then were, and reflected that your own and the lives of the five-score souls who were in that ship hung not upon a few three or four-inch planks, but upon the honesty with which they had been fitted.

In twos and threes the other passengers now came below, the last to arrive being Captain Jackson and his wife. The time passing, and nothing worse seeming to come to the ship than the blow that had hove her over, put a little spirit into most of us. The most dejected and downcast of us all was Mr. Thompson Tucker, who sat silent and miserably white, starting convulsively as if

to rush on deck whenever the vessel rolled more heavily than usual, and constantly gazing around him with wild and terrified eyes. I recalled the remark about him I had made when he joked over the dead seaman in the life-buoy, and thought to myself that for once in my life anyhow, I had shown myself a prophet.

"They seem to have brought the ship to her course again, Captain Jackson," said I.

"They have," he answered. "It's not what I should recommend. I should heave her to on the starboard-tack, and smother the hole in her bow by thrumming a sail, and securing it round the cutwater and under the keel. If you can't stop a leak by fothering, you can ease the pressure of water upon the hole."

"Depend upon it Captain Thompson knows what he's about, sir," said Mr. Griffith, petulantly.

"Knows what he's about!" shouted the navy man. "Would this collision have happened had he had his side-lights over? It's all very well for his officers to defend him, but who the devil, I want to know, is going to make good the loss of my baggage and my wife's, if we've to take to the boats?"

"Oh, let us have no quarrelling at this dreadful time!" groaned Aunt Damaris.

"You'll not be the only loser, Captain Jackson," said Mr. Joyce.

"Supposing there is any loss at all," I added.

"If only our lives are spared—if only these little ones are preserved, the sea may take all else," cried Mrs. Joyce, convulsively hugging her little girl.

"Nurse, why oo not put little Tommy to bed? he is so seepy!" here piped out the mite in the nurse's arms, meaning by little Tommy, himself. "Mamma, Tommy cannot seep in nurse's arms."

This set my darling crying, and well it might; for, on my word, nothing makes a shipwreck sadder than children. They are ignorant of what is going on; they will play or prattle or lie slumbering peacefully down to the last moment; and to look from them to the fearful reality is to behold a contrast that might well break the heart.

Meanwhile, by order of the captain, of course, the stewards had returned to the cuddy, and had gone to work to clear the deck of the dinner litter, and to place spirits and wine and biscuits as usual upon the table. It was now nine o'clock by my watch. Nothing more had been said to me by Aunt Damaris about my being Jack Seymour; indeed, for a long while, she had sat by my side without uttering a syllable, except when she had called to Captain Jackson not to quarrel. My left arm circled Florence who leaned against me, and again and again I would say something encouraging to

her, telling her to take notice how easy the motion of the ship was, how the pumps remained idle, a sure sign that the water was confined forward, and so on. Every word thus spoken she would answer with a loving smile or glance, or with a caress of her cheek upon my shoulder. We were lovers without fear that dismal night. There was no more acting, no more taking care because others were looking on. We showed ourselves wedded in heart, as the others showed themselves who were wedded indeed; and never a word did Aunt Damaris say, who had the full truth of it now; she let her niece cling to me as if it were right that she should do so, whilst she herself stuck like a barnacle to my side, as if, in one short hour, all the prejudices against that vulgar young sailor chap, Jack Seymour, with which she had been primed by Alphonso, had been swept away forward into the fore compartment and dissolved in the water there.

Seeing the grog on the table, I mixed a small quantity of brandy and water, and insisted upon Aunt Damaris and Florence drinking. I then called to Thompson Tucker to wake up and be a man, and attend to poor Mrs. O'Brien, and I also induced Mrs. and Miss Grant to drink, but the others I left to their husbands. I took care to swallow a nip myself, saying as I held up the glass, "Here, ladies and gentlemen, I drink to

the good ship *Strathmore*. She has carried us safely through two oceans and a half; she has the scent of the Australian shores in her nose, she knows the road, and under God who watches over brave English seamen—and there are hearts of oak in this vessel, Captain Jackson, though she mounts no guns—she'll not betray us!"

"Hurrah!" cried Mr. Griffith; "Hurrah!" cried Mr. Joyce; and little Tommy in the nurse's arms, cried "Hoowah!" You saw the poor people under the break of the poop crowding and elbowing round the windows to have a look at us when they heard this cheering. More yet was wanted, so still standing at the table and flourishing the glass I had emptied as a band conductor would a baton, I piped up at the top of my voice—

"Cheer, boys, cheer! no more of idle sorrow,
Courage, true hearts! shall bear us on our way!
Hope points before and shows the bright to-morrow—"

the best song, by George, I could have pitched upon for such a time; and hang me, boys, if, with the exception of Mrs. Grant and Aunt Damaris, they didn't all come into the chorus; I wouldn't let them off; one after another I *looked* them in, singing meanwhile with all my lungs, until the cuddy rang again with the hearty inspiring words and tune. Ay, shipwreck is the time to test the value of song-writing. Think of a sentimental ditty at such a moment! It would be worse than a green sea

washing fore and aft. The man that can give people a song that'll put heart and life into them in spite of death grinning at them down through the skylight, is the lad for me, and were the whole ocean made of rum there wouldn't be too much of it for sailors to drink such a man's health in.

"Oh, Mr. Egerton, you're the boy to do us good," exclaimed poor Mrs. O'Brien, still calling me Egerton.

I now said I would step on deck for a few minutes to have a look at the weather and get the latest news.

"Don't be long!" cried Aunt Damaris. "I shall follow you if you are."

I promised to return speedily, and bring the captain with me too, if he could leave the deck, and with a smile from my darling, I jumped on to the companion ladder and gained the poop.

It took me some moments to find my sight, for the night lay still a very dark shadow, though not so dark as it was an hour before. I stood a bit groping with my eyes, and by-and-by got the outline of the rail, the mizzenmast along with the loom of the yards, then the binnacle haze with the helmsman behind it like a blot of ink in the darkness over the taffrail. There was a very fine rain in the wind, more like mist than rain. Not being able to see forwards where the wreckage was, the ship seemed as usual. The phosphorous gleamed

in the bows of the curling seas, and the cold breeze swept up shrill into the black canvas. But one thing I seemed to find—that the ship was down by the head, so deep there, indeed, that every fall of her bows raised her stern high, and made the glooming deep forward look to slant up as tall as the fore yardarms. This was to be expected ; but you wanted to be on deck to realize to the full your knowledge of a huge rent in the ship's bow. Why, it made me shiver as I stood staring forwards when the head swell lifted her, for *then* it came into one with a flash, that the weight of the water in the compartment was at such a moment full on the bulkhead, and that if *it* went, the ship would vanish in a few minutes. I spied two figures at the foremost end of the poop, and walked to them.

“Is that you, Jack?” said Daniel.

“Yes.”

“It was you that set them off singing, eh? I looked through the skylight when I heard the hullabaloo, and watched you beating the time into 'em with a tumbler. It's the help I want. It's like your old self.”

“What's been done, Daniel, may I ask? Have you managed to solder the old hooker's wound in any fashion?”

“All that can be done has been done,” he answered. “We have got a sail over the bows, and

the pressure of the driving stem should keep it over the hole, and it may relieve the bulkhead somewhat. A *hole* do I call it? Why the carpenter reports half the starboard bow smashed in, cathead and starboard forechannel gone, foretopmast gone at the cap, jibbooms gone, and that's only the beginning. The steamer's bows have cut clean through into the topgallant forecastle. If daylight ever shines upon us, you'll see nothing but a wreck forward."

"The bulkhead's our bows; we're driving through it with nothing else," said Daniel's companion, who proved to be Mr. Thornton.

"Are you wise in driving?" I asked.

"What's the difference, whether we drive or heave-to, man? The water'll come in any way. Driving at least keeps the sail over the bow."

"If the bulkhead goes, then," said I, "we go with it—without time enough to say our prayers!"

"Oh, if it carries away, it'll have to carry away aft," replied the chief mate; "and it can't do that bodily, I fancy, for the cargo's chock up against it. The plank may start under the pressure or the caulking fail, and let the water in faster than we can pump it out; and to jettison the cargo there to come at that leakage would imperil the whole bulkhead. But the water's not likely to come in in such a hurry as to drown us out of hand. At least I *hope* not."

For a man to *hope* that a dreadful thing will not happen does not encourage one much.

"Can I say a word to you, Thompson?" I exclaimed. He drew away from the mate. "Daniel," said I, "I don't think we must put any faith in that bulkhead."

"No," he replied, "we must not trust it, though whilst it holds it's good. If it'll stand till daylight, without driving us to the pumps, I shall be satisfied."

"Daniel, I wish to ask you as an old friend and shipmate, should it come to our taking to the boats, to allow me and my sweetheart and her aunt to be together."

"I see no difficulty," he replied. "You can have charge of one of the boats and welcome. You shall know which when the time comes. Thornton and I must talk over that business of leaving the ship. If the ladies are willing to accompany you, they're welcome enough. But, Jack, this is a fearful blow,—a fearful blow for me, my lad."

I grasped his hand. "Of course it is, Daniel. A worse could hardly befall a shipmaster. But you have met it as a man, you are carrying it through as a man, and if God spares our lives you'll have a hundred witnesses at your back to prove how the thing happened. Professionally it will leave you unharmed, and in what other way can it injure you?"

“Heaven grant we all come safe out of it!” he exclaimed with a slight falter in his voice. “Have you anything more to say to me, Jack?”

“According to our reckoning to-day, St. Paul’s Island will be about a hundred odd miles away out to windward yonder.”

“Yes, yes, I know what’s in your mind,” he answered; “we have discussed *that* question and settled it. I’d rather take my chance of that bulk-head, and the pumps with such gangs as we can put to them, than ratch to that island with the likelihood of the ship going to pieces before we can land the few stores which remain. By holding on we may fall in with a vessel to keep us company, and pull through the accursed job after all. But to fetch that island would be to cast the ship away. There’s damage yonder that’s not to be repaired out of dry dock; and you’ve got to realize what one hundred of us, men, women, and children, thrown upon that rock, would signify, lingering there maybe for weeks, ultimately to rot away. No, no! let us push on—let us shove on.”

Well, in the marine calling there is more difference of opinion than in any other. Had I had charge of that ship, with her starboard bow torn out and nothing to trust to but a bulkhead, I should have tried for St. Paul’s anyway, seeing it was the only spot of land amid thousands of miles of water, and having landed the passengers and

what stores I could have saved, have trusted to Providence—for much must be left to God in all things—to bring us help. But I was not captain, and that makes the difference; I could not think as captain. Daniel's heart was in his ship and cargo; he would wish to save her at all hazards; and forlorn as his hope was, as he himself implied, still he would cling to even the ghost of a chance, knowing well what the salving of the vessel and her freight would mean to him who had not a State but a private firm of money-makers to serve.

He left me with a kind of impatience to rejoin Mr. Thornton, as if he was afraid I should begin to argue with him. I was now so used to the darkness that I could see with tolerable distinctness. The maintack had been boarded and the maintopgallant sail set. I went to the weather rail to see past the mainsail, and could just make out the foremast with the foresail pulling at it. It looked a big mutilated shadow. There being no more head sail accounted for the mizzen topsail being furled, and I wondered that even with the mainsail she should steer easily; but apparently, as the wind then was, the canvas upon her left her well under command of the helm. There were men at work in the gloom forward; you heard their voices, but could not distinguish them. Lights gleamed on the main and quarter-decks, and looking over

the rail, I spied groups of 'tween-deck and steerage-passengers below restlessly flitting to and fro, or cowering in dark blotches under the bulwarks and near the cuddy front. The hoarse murmur of their voices rose along with the crying of babies and little children. But the panic among them appeared to have passed, and it was likely enough that the poor ignorant creatures were beginning to believe that the danger was over, though they would not trust themselves below yet. Cold enough it must have been for the women and children. Terror makes people cold, and when the wind is raw too, then you get the most grievous element of shipwreck—a degree of physical suffering which, if protracted, makes drowning welcome. The blackness on the sea was rendered startling by the sparkle of the green fires in it and by the ghastly coming and fading of froth. The breeze was fresh, but the ship sailed sluggishly, with a new note in the surges which she threw from her, and a sickening dip of the head in every plunge that gave you the idea of her being giddy, and reeling in a fainting manner as she rolled along over the ebony folds which came swelling up against her lee bow. The sky looked to be a slow procession of ponderous shadows, thinning here and there, then thickening up again, so that sometimes you could see the maintopgallant sail floating and swaying black in the airier gloom, then melting out as the darkness

drove over with a fiercer sweep of the mist-like rain in it.

"Thompson," said I, approaching him, "I promised to bring you with me to the cuddy when I returned. Nobody can hearten passengers like the skipper."

"Oh, I'll go to them," said he; "though God knows I have little enough to tell them."

We walked to the companion in silence. Ere slewing round to drop below I took notice of the naked mizzenmast, the dim blotch of the man at the wheel behind the binnacle, the liquid ebony of the sea making one with the black heavens, the wailing of the wind aloft, the rushing and seething sound of foam, and, above all, the sluggish sickening stoop of the stern when the swell drove under the fore-foot and lifted the horrible dead-weight of water that filled the fore compartment. Only a sailor perhaps would have felt *this*; but never to me was anything plainer in all my life.

There was a passionate expectation in the looks of many of the passengers as Daniel entered the cuddy, followed by me. They were all seated just as I had left them, and I at once resumed my place betwixt Florence and her aunt.

"What is the news, Mr. Seymour?" instantly exclaimed the old lady, giving me my name very easily.

"Why, that we are still heading for Australia,

and that the ship's hold is free of water," I replied.

"Are we still in great danger?" asked my darling, as if she wished to think, dear heart, that our peril was not so formidable as it had been.

"Be easy, sweet pet," I whispered. "We *are* in danger; but it is not of a kind that need frighten us."

Meanwhile, Thompson was mixing himself a sup of brandy and water at the table. The old familiar crimson of his face had faded away into a pale dingy red; care and grief were expressed in every line of his hearty countenance; nevertheless he had forced a cheerful look as he entered the cuddy, and preserved it as he stood bareheaded near a swinging lamp, the light of which glittered in the wet upon his cloth coat.

"Can ye give us any hope of reaching Australia in this ship, capt'n?" asked Mrs. O'Brien.

"I'll make her do her best to carry you there," he answered, smiling; "if she fails it will not be my fault."

"If she fails, what shall we do?" cried Mr. Thompson Tucker, breaking a long silence, and speaking in an extraordinarily hollow note.

"Why, sir," replied Daniel, "we have six good boats; one of them, the long-boat, is pretty near as big as the ship that Christopher Columbus discovered America in; two of the others are life-

boats, the gig's a clipper, and the others fit to sail round the world in."

"Oh, but the idea of long exposure in an open boat at sea is dreadful!" cried Mrs. Marmaduke Mortimer. "Ever since I was a child I have always thought *that* the most frightful part of shipwreck." Her husband wrapped his arm around her.

"It's not so bad as drowning, ma'am," said Daniel. "But then the boats are our last resource. We're not driven to them *yet*." And giving her a smile, he swigged off the contents of his tumbler.

"How many souls are there altogether in this ship?" inquired Captain Jackson, asking the question with his arms tightly folded, his head down, and his eyes peering up under his brows.

"Ninety-five, sir; ship's company forty, fifteen in the steerage, twenty-three in the 'tweendecks, and seventeen of you ladies and gentlemen—ninety-five."

"How many will your long-boat hold?"

"Oh, if it comes to the boats," replied Daniel, speaking with the utmost coolness, though there was a deal of offensive imperiousness in the navy man's manner, "the disposition of the people will be twenty-six in the long-boat, fifteen in every quarter-boat, and nine in the gig."

"I hope in the name of God," exclaimed Captain

Jackson, "that no blunders or omissions will be found out when it's too late. I speak with submission, but I know what the merchant service is; tackles won't travel; rowlocks and oars are missing; plugs are left out; there are masts and no sails to be found; rudders without yokes or tillers. It is a question of life or death, and I have a right in the name of my fellow-passengers to demand, as one who has used the sea and knows the life, that the precious time you, sir, and your mates now possess, will be devoted to seeing everything ready for an emergency."

"Everything *is* ready," replied Daniel, eyeing him coldly. "You say you know the merchant service, but you don't seem to be acquainted with its etiquette. I will thank you not to teach me my duty."

"If you are speaking in the name of your fellow-passengers to Captain Thompson," exclaimed Aunt Damaris, as viciously as ever she had spoken at any time during the voyage, "I beg that you will omit *me* as one of those for whom you constitute yourself spokesman, Captain Jackson."

"Ladies are ignorant of the dangers of the sea," cried Captain Jackson. "I have a right as a married man, with my wife in this ship, to urge upon Captain Thompson the necessity of amply providing for our safety."

"I am quite ready to listen to any proposals you

may have to make for providing for our safety," said Daniel. "Will you tell me what *you* would do if you had charge?"

The navy man did not answer.

At that moment Mr. Thornton called to the skipper from the head of the companion steps. Daniel, giving the ladies a little bow, went quietly on deck. I listened, not liking that sudden summons; but the call was so quiet and Daniel's departure so tranquil that the others appeared to find nothing alarming in it.

"You have been a sailor, Mr. Seymour," said Aunt Damaris, in a low voice to me, "and can answer my question: Is Captain Thompson doing all that he should to save the ship?"

"All."

"Is there nothing omitted by him which he ought to do?"

"Nothing that I can imagine," I replied; for there was no good telling her that in my opinion he ought to try to make St. Paul's.

She now fell to catechizing me; asked me how long I was at sea, what made me quit the life, what my experiences were as a sailor. Suddenly, whilst in the midst of answering the last question, I stopped dead, hearing the ringing clank of the pumps on the maindeck. At any other time that sound would have passed unnoticed; but *now* the first note of it seemed to roll through the cuddy

like a bitter blast, striking a deadly chill into every heart.

“Hark!” shouted Captain Jackson, sitting bolt upright, and lifting his hand; “they have manned the pumps!”

“What does it mean?” shrieked Mrs. Marmaduke Mortimer.

“God Almighty, we’re sinking!” howled Mr. Thompson Tucker, and, springing to his feet, he bolted like a madman to the companion ladder. In a breath, his behaviour created a panic. Seizing his wife’s hand, Captain Jackson rushed on deck with her, and he was followed pell mell by Mrs. O’Brien, the Joyces, the Mortimers, and Mrs. and Miss Grant. Florence’s hand was on my arm and her eyes riveted on my face. Her aunt had jumped up, but I grasped her dress and detained her.

“For mercy’s sake be calm, Miss Hawke,” I shouted; “why, if it weren’t for distraction of this kind, shipwreck would seldom be the horrible thing it’s made. Those pumps are manned because they have found out that water is running into the hold; but you may be sure it runs slowly, or Captain Thompson would give orders to have the boats lowered. There is nothing to terrify one in a leaky ship, so long as the pumps act and there are people to keep them going. Sailors have declared to me that for years at a stretch they have sailed

in nothing but leaky vessels. Until the bulkhead gives way—and the chief mate says it can't do that—I shall consider the *Strathmore* safe."

The poor old lady, trembling all over and directing glances full of fright, now at the companion steps, now at the skylight, now at the windows in the cuddy front, resumed her place, murmuring, "I am sure you would not deceive me, Mr. Seymour, for Florence's sake."

"Nor for your own," I replied. "I have the captain's permission to take you both under my special charge. It's not a moment for boasting, but *he* knows I'm not ignorant of the sea, and he would not concede to me such a trust as you two if he was not well assured of my judgment."

"Oh, Mr. Seymour, I am quite satisfied to be in your charge—I am sure you are a clever sailor," exclaimed the old lady, passing her arm through mine and hauling herself hard and tight against me.

"Hear *that*, Florence darling! Miss Hawke, listen!" I cried, as the seamen who were working the pumps broke into a chorus that came rattling into the cuddy with a hurricane note. "Drowning men don't sing."

It was indeed inspiriting to hear their voices.

"Oh, Jack," said my pet, taking my hand, "I am sure no harm can befall us with you at our side."

"I am so sorry," exclaimed Aunt Damaris, holding on tight to my arm on the other hand, "that I did not know who you were until this evening. How *could* your papa, Florence, talk to me about Mr. Seymour as he did? How easily he is to be deceived! Thank heaven you are with us, Mr. Seymour. Oh, if we are spared to reach Australia I shall have a long story to tell my stubborn, prejudiced brother."

Just then the chief mate came into the cuddy. As he approached the table to mix himself a glass of grog, he said, "You are wise to keep under shelter, ladies. Was it the sound of the pumps that sent the others flying? They've been heard often enough during the voyage."

"But water must be coming into the ship, sir, or the crew would not be pumping," cried Aunt Damaris.

"Why, yes, water is coming into the ship, certainly," answered the mate, holding up the glass to the light to measure the quantity of brandy he poured into it; "but it's being chucked out at the same time, d'ye see, Miss Hawke, and so it don't matter."

"Where do you reckon it's coming from, Mr. Thornton?" I asked.

"Why, through the bulkhead, I hope. Better there than anywhere else, Mr. Egerton. Don't want to think anything's been started abaft, you

know. If the ship's sound from where the bulk-head begins to the sternpost, and the bulkhead don't cave in—and how's it going to do that with fourteen hundred tons of cargo abaft to shore it up?—why, the pumps may be able to keep us watertight, so far as we are concerned, until we reach Sydney."

There was a tell-tale compass fixed to a beam just over the skipper's chair at the table; the mate stood near it as he conversed, and my eye going from his face to it, I noticed something that caused me to disengage myself from Aunt Damaris's arm and get up. A glance at the compass sufficed; the course had been altered to east-south-east, and the ship was lying as close to the wind as she would sail.

The meaning of this was that Daniel was making for St. Paul's Island.

I returned to the sofa, the mate looking at me hard. "I hope," said Aunt Damaris, addressing him, "that you will not trouble yourself to deceive us."

"Certainly not," he answered, quickly.

"At all events this gentleman," she continued, meaning me, "is not to be deceived. His name is not Egerton, but Seymour; he is an old sailor and knows exactly how we are situated and what kind of danger we are in."

I laughed and said, "My old shipmate, the

captain, will tell you my story, Mr. Thornton. My name is Seymour, and I had some years of service in this employ." And pretending to have something to say to him about myself which I did not want the old lady to hear, I approached him and whispered, "I see the course has been altered. Does the captain mean to try for St. Paul's?"

He nodded.

"Is the leakage heavy?"

He nodded again.

"She will have been strained by the blow abaft the bulkhead?"

He whispered, "She is like a sieve to starboard from on a line with the cathead to abaft the forechains. The utmost we can hope to do is to keep her afloat till daylight. But pray keep this news to yourself. If the passengers get panic-stricken it may spread to the crew." He emptied his glass and returned on deck.

"What was he saying, Mr. Seymour?" cried Aunt Damaris.

"Why," I replied, "you see it was necessary that I should round off what you told him about me. But there is a freemasonry among sailors, and we understand each other now."

I looked at Florence as I said this; but the answer, clearly, did not satisfy *her*. There was intense wistfulness in her beautiful eyes, and her face had a marble-like gleam in the lamp-light.

Yet she said nothing; merely slipped her hand into mine as I sat down between her and her aunt, and for awhile we remained silent, listening to the clanking and pulsing of the pumps on the main-deck, the yearning moan of water washing and gurgling along the lee bends, and the creaking of bulkheads as the vessel rolled on the swell which the shift of the helm had brought nearly abeam, and pitched over the surges which were now striking full against the mutilated starboard bow.

CHAPTER V.

THE NIGHT PASSES.

ONE after another the passengers returned to the cuddy, urged, and, as I might tell by hearing his voice, even commanded, by Captain Thompson to do so. The last to arrive was Captain Jackson and his wife. It was now eleven o'clock, and there stood yet six or seven hours betwixt us and the dawn of day. The pumps clanked incessantly with a throbbing, thrashing sound, and there were times when you would hear the water washing about the decks as the ship rolled.

About this hour the steward came up out of the steerage bearing a great can of rum in his hands, and he told us it was for the crew and the 'tweendeck passengers, many of whom had formed themselves into gangs to relieve the seamen at the pumps. The Joyces laid their children down upon one of the couches and covered them with rugs; and there the little creatures remained, sleeping soundly, as if the rhythmic beating of the pumps

was a song in their ears to hush them to slumber. Squalls of rain occasionally drove over and lashed the skylights fiercely, and Daniel as well as Mr. Thornton and the second mate came below for their oilskins; but they kept clear of us, gliding in and then hurrying out, quiet as shadows. To me the sitting in that cuddy and waiting was the hardest part of that hard time. But it was not only that I served Thompson by keeping below and so by my example inducing others to remain there, I felt that my presence gave Florence courage. Come what might I would be at her side to meet it. But I tell you, lads, it came hard upon a man who had a sailor's instincts, who felt the deck to be the proper and only place for him, to be seated as it were in a church in that cuddy, merging himself into the vessel, as it might be, and thinking out of every roll and heave of her, as she herself might if she had had intelligence for such a job, so as to calculate how the water deepened in her and what the pumps were doing; and all because I had no duties to discharge, no people of my own cloth to talk to and confer with, no arrangements to plan, nothing to carry my thoughts away from the deadly gash in the star-board bow and the sieve-like draining abaft the bulkhead where it met the ship's side.

All the time my expectation was strained to the fullest for a hurried summons of us on deck. And

this let me tell you I prayed with all my might and main against. It was a cruelly black night, there was wind enough to make the sea dangerous for boat-lowering in a darkness that gave nothing to the eyes and everything to the hands; discipline might fail at the last, and I might be separated from my darling. I sat with my arm round her waist and would press her to me when I thought thus. No songs sounded at the pumps now; the people ground at them as though each gang were a bit of mechanism, and the harsh thumping of them and the gushing of the water that you would hear in the brief intervals of silence when the ship hung in the hollow or paused for a breath on the summit of the swell, ere making her slanting rush, would have put nightmares of fancy into any sailor-man's brains who had nothing to do but to sit and listen and think.

As the time wore on some of the passengers dozed: Miss Grant fell asleep with her head on her mother's shoulder, Mr. and Mrs. Marmaduke Mortimer slumbered with their arms twined round each other, the Joyces' nurse snored loudly; but though the others closed their eyes you'd notice first one and then another start up with a look of fright, and then give a wild kind of sigh and sit listening with heavy eyes to the clanking of the pumps. Once, after exchanging a few words with Aunt Damaris, whose spirits I did my utmost to

sustain, I looked at Florence and found her asleep with her head against my breast. She had removed her hat and her hair sparkled in the light as though a packet of gold-dust had been hove over it, and the scent of it was as sweet as eglantine. Lovelier she had never looked, with the lashes of her closed eyes dark upon her delicate cheeks, her red lips parted, her tender bosom softly rising and falling, her hands like snowflakes placed on her lap. As I looked at her I thought of Clifton, our first meeting, my early love-dream, her luxurious home, her faithfulness to me. Heart alive! think of me holding her, watching her, to the dirge of the ringing pumps out in the blackness on the maindeck, whilst the rain squalls shrieked upon the skylights and every fresh heave of the ship was more sluggish and sickly than the last! Turning, I saw Aunt Damaris with her head inclined forward and her eyes upon my darling.

“Is she asleep, Mr. Seymour?”

“Yes, hush! pray let her sleep.”

“Oh, what would her father feel if he knew what we were undergoing?” she exclaimed.

“He parted with her lightly enough,” I whispered. “He is an old traveller and knows the danger of the sea. He could not wonder that she should be in peril, for *that* is every one’s risk who sails the ocean; but what would he say if he

knew whose arm supported her, if he knew whose breast pillowed her ? ”

“ He did not know you ; some one must have prejudiced him against you,” she said.

“ But I have a friend to plead for me if ever it should come to that,” said I, gently. “ You see she loves me—look at her ! ” I continued, softly drawing back that she might plainly behold the sleeping girl : “ you would not part us now, Miss Hawke ? ”

“ Oh, Mr. Seymour, it is not the time to think of such things ! Indeed I would not part you—I liked you much as Mr. Egerton—you should have been candid, sir. It has been a long deception and you are both guilty ; but indeed I would not part you. No. There is too much sincerity—it is too late to object. May God preserve us ! ” she suddenly exclaimed

No more was said. The time passed, but I could not tell the hours, for no bells were sounded, and I durst not move to draw out my watch lest I should awaken Florence. Aunt Damaris fell asleep, and drooping against me favoured me with the weight of her angular body. Once the notion came into my head of old Hawke coming into the cuddy and looking at us three, and the fancy of the expression on his face set me smiling. But merriment was not a thing to live long in that cuddy. At any time, of all solemn sights in this world the most impressive to my fancy is that of

a crowd of people slumbering in a ship. Enter an emigrant vessel's 'tweendecks, where the people lie exposed in tiers of bunks, and listen to the deep respiration broken here and there by a cry, a moan, a muttering of unintelligible words, and then to the creaking and straining sounds breaking through the muffled thunder of parting waters, the stifled humming of wind droning out of the rigging down the hatchways. It's a freak of imagination no doubt, for what's more commonplace and prosaic than such a sight? Yet to me, the great wonder of life and death and eternity is preached in such a manner by it that the mightiest sermon that ever abased the pride of the human heart and melted it into bitter tears of contrition would be, alongside of such a show, the feeblest of feeble echoes as an appeal to the soul. But if one is to be moved in a time of safety by a picture of a sleeping crowd of human beings cradled upon that visible symbol of eternity, the deep, shrouded in the darkness of the great ocean night that makes a phantom of the ship and spectres of all human life within her, what sort of impression would be given one by the same sight in the hour of danger, when instead of a cradle the liquid ebony of the deep grows slowly into a spacious grave upon whose brink those sleepers there before you hang, one with a smile, another brokenly whispering as if to a friend, all of them placid as if their time of

immortality had come and they were typifying in their living bodies under the black shadow of death's outstretched wings the unconcern of the spirit for all that concerns the flesh?

Somewhat in this way ran my thoughts as I turned my eyes from one to another of my fellow-passengers, most of whom were at this hour fast asleep, the exceptions being Captain Jackson, Mrs. O'Brien, and myself. All this while the pumps were kept constantly going, and four times already had the steward passed through the cuddy on his way to the maindeck, bearing cans of rum for the labouring people there. Presently the navy man, who had been on deck for a few minutes, came below again, and seeing me wide awake, exclaimed, "I doubt if they'll be able to keep her afloat till daybreak. What a cursed dilemma to drag us into? It serves me right. What the devil business had I to go to Australia in a sailing ship!"

His loud voice woke up everybody but the children; and painful it was to witness the general rush of consternation into the faces of the people as they opened their eyes and heard the clanking of the pumps.

"Oh, Jack!" cried Florence, "have I been asleep? You have had to support me! How thoughtless I am!" And Aunt Damaris exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Seymour, I hope I have not tired you. How good you are to let me rest!"

"Pity that naval man refuses to learn how to whisper," said I. "However, since you are both awake, I'll just step on deck and see what's doing."

You would have known the wind was failing by its coming no harder than it did before, though now the ship was looking right up into it; the mizzen topsail and spanker had been set—quietly enough; for no note of that job had reached me in the cuddy—and the ship surged slowly forwards, making a great sputtering to windward with her crushed bow, and sliding off the swells as if she felt that her time was come, and that she debated at every heave whether she should trouble herself to lift to the next fold. It was about seven bells in the middle watch, and there remained about two and a half hours of darkness. The night was a tremendous shadow, though sometimes the wind as it came along would blow away into the murkiness over the port quarter till it seemed to lighten it, and you looked for a star: but if ever the eye was caught by the glimmer of light that night, it was no more at the best than the phosphoric radiance gleaming wet in the black curl of a swell or boiling in a sort of smoke midst the churned-up foam that rushed away under the counter. The decks were streaming from a smother of rain that had lately blown past; the breeze had sharpened its edge of

cold in these small hours, and it went to my heart like the blow of a knife to look away into the black sea and think of Florence in an open boat there, with nothing betwixt her and the rain, and no shelter from the chill wind moaning out of the black hollows over the low gunwale. But it wouldn't do to give way to thoughts of that kind, so I went along the lee side of the poop to look at what they were about on the maindeck; and there in the lantern-light saw the gangs slaving at the pumps, and a crowd of people blackening the deck between the poop-ladders. There was a kind of fever in the sound those pumps made; it was like the ship's heart beating madly; they were the old-fashioned break-pumps, and in the dim glimmer you spied the toiling figures stooping and rising, stooping and rising, the change of posture happening with a sort of frenzy, whilst the water gushed furiously on to the decks and went sobbing away out of the scupper-holes in the darkness over the side. The steward (as I believed) was serving out rum to a gang of men gathered around the quarter-deck capstan; the cuddy light shone faintly there, and you noticed the people like shadows tossing the tots of fiery liquor down their throats and stepping back into the gloom to make way for the others.

"Who's that to leeward there?" called out Mr. Thornton from the weather side of the poop. I

answered and approached him. Then Daniel, who stood near the foremast quarter-boat, joined us.

"The captain has told me your story, Mr. Seymour," said the chief mate. "You must let me shake a brother sailor by the hand. I never could have guessed from your behaviour that you had been one of us, and of this employ too, in your time." We shook hands. "Sorry indeed that your grand romance should have a chapter of shipwreck in it."

"May we all be spared to finish the story, Mr. Thornton!"

"Why, do you doubt it, Jack?" exclaimed Daniel. "Mr. Thornton told me you had noticed the shift of course. I'm trying for your island—it's our only chance now."

"The bulkhead's staunch enough, I believe; if not, the pumps could have kept its drainings under," said the chief mate; "the mischief is abaft; the stem of that cursed cowardly steamer has shaken the old fabric open."

"What water have you?"

"Four and a half feet was the last report," answered Daniel, speaking quietly. "I'm only waiting till daylight to get away."

"The whole business of the boats is ordered in your mind, I suppose?" I asked.

"Oh, yes! I'll give you the programme. First, you will have charge of the gig; you can have the

boatswain and five of the crew, the two ladies, yourself—nine; that's her freight. She's a good boat and sails nicely."

"I am quite satisfied."

"I shall take command of the long-boat, with five seamen and twenty-one passengers of all kinds. Mr. Thornton and the second mate will have the two port quarter-boats, numbering thirty souls, and the third mate and carpenter the starboard quarter-boats, numbering thirty souls."

"How do you reckon St. Paul's bears, Daniel?"

"About south by west now."

"It'll bear south at daybreak," said the chief mate.

"I suppose the boats are all ready—there'll be nothing missing?" said I.

"Oh, they've been seen to," answered Daniel. "Have you been bitten by that impudent naval officer that you ask such a question? You heard him about the side-lights? He'd criminate me if he could. But how many sailing ships show their lights in the midst of such an ocean as this?"* and he then told me how the disaster had happened. The second mate was in charge; there were two hands stationed on the look-out forward. Nothing was seen of the steamer, if steamer she were, until

* Few, indeed, in those days, and few enough in these, though the necessity has increased a hundredfold since then, owing to the number of steamships now afloat.

she was close aboard, and then her lumping shape seemed to jump out of the darkness at once. The *Strathmore's* helm was put hard up, the second mate thinking that she would cross our bows; simultaneously, the helm of the steamer was starboarded, and like a flash her stem took the ship's starboard bow close to the cathead, slewing the vessel round and heeling her over, as I have described. The fellows forward sprang off the forecastle to get clear from the falling spars; for some minutes all was wild confusion; and when the steamer was looked for, she had utterly vanished. "I had hoped to keep her afloat," said Daniel, always talking quietly, like a man who had made up his mind and saw the idleness of worry and any further trouble; "but as that can't be, why, we must turn to and save our lives, Jack; and that I trust may be done."

"What distance do you make St. Paul's?"

"It'll be about seventy-five or eighty miles when we start for it."

"And the weather?"

"There's an improvement in the glass; a small one, it's true, but enough to prove that there's nothing worse behind this."

"Well, God preserve us all!" said I. "Four and a half feet of water in the hold in spite of that fierce pumping, eh?" And with a kind of shiver,

for the wind, when it comes raw, will blow shrill into your marrow when you have had no sleep for a night, I went below, just in time to escape a heavy shower that rattled upon the deck like a hundred buckets of snipe-shot capsized from aloft.

“Well, what’s the news?” said Captain Jackson in his noisy voice, as I sat down in my old place, whilst Florence put her arm through mine, as if she would keep me there now that she had me again. I felt that it would be cruel and useless to conceal the truth; so I answered: “The water gains slowly upon the ship in spite of the pumps, and the captain proposes to leave her at daybreak.”

Mr. Thompson Tucker dashed his hands to his face, and groaned and writhed like a man in torment. A new shade of pallor came into every countenance, and Aunt Damaris said, in a choking voice, “What is to become of us, then?”

“Why,” I replied, cheerfully, “we shall take refuge in St. Paul’s Island, where we are bound in a very short time to make our existence known to a passing vessel who will convey us to the Cape or to Australia.”

“Oh, Marmaduke, what a frightful position for us to be in!” shrieked the young wife, flinging both her arms around her husband’s neck and staring wildly round at us.

“No, no, don’t call it frightful, Mrs. Mortimer,” said I; “think how much worse it might be. We

have good boats; the weather is full of promise; we have but a short distance to sail; and our rescue cannot be long delayed."

But I could not comfort them. Captain Jackson roared out the wildest abuse of the ship, her captain and officers, damned them as unprofessional rascals who had brought all hands into the worst mess that had ever befallen a vessel's company, and swore if they were saved he'd have them tried at the Old Bailey. Mrs. and Miss Grant moaned and wept together, Mr. and Mrs. Marma-duke Mortimer sobbed in each other's arms, the children woke up and cried bitterly, utterly distracting their unhappy parents, the nurse grew hysterical and cried out wildly for her mother, and Mrs. Jackson crouched down on the sofa, with her face buried in her arm. The most heroical of them was Mrs. O'Brien. She cried to Mr. Thompson Tucker, "We're not to be saved by weeping. Let's be manly for God's sake, or what'll we do? Ye all hear what Mr. Egerton says—that it might be worse. Let's think of that, and, instead of groaning and cursing like Captain Jackson yonder, who, as a sailor, should be helping our spirits instead of terrifying us with his words, put our trust in Captain Thompson and his officers and ask God to watch over us."

"Bravely spoken, Mrs. O'Brien!" I cried.

"We shall have to leave every stick we own

behind us—damn them,” roared Captain Jackson, shaking his fist at the skylight.

Florence, leaning on my arm, said nothing; Aunt Damaris on the other side sat like a stone statue, with her mouth moving as though she talked to herself. When the poor people had calmed down a bit, I advised them to make use of the short time that remained by putting themselves into their warmest clothes and pocketing such valuables as were of a portable kind, but I recommended them not to hamper themselves too much in that way, “because,” said I, “the deeper you sink the boats the worse off you’ll be; and then again, I have heard of a man trying to get into a boat, dropping overboard and going down like a stone, because he had crammed eighty pounds of gold into his shirt; whereas,” said I, “if it hadn’t been for that dead weight the others could have fished him out and saved his life.” Most of them acted on my advice, hastily going into their cabins. I then prevailed upon Aunt Damaris and my darling to go and clothe themselves in their warmest attire; and whilst they were at that job, I went to my cabin and shifted my togs, putting on warm socks, half-boots, pilot-cloth trousers and jacket, a flannel shirt, and the like; for, thought I, if the wind holds to the southward, and we have to pass to-morrow night in an open boat, we shall need all the warmth that

clothes can give us. I also stowed a small compass away in my pocket, a burning glass, some tin boxes of wax matches, and my pistol, along with a couple of handfuls of cartridges. For awhile I stood considering what other things I might need, and then my eyes settling upon the box of clothes I should be leaving to go to the bottom, I fell into a short reverie, thinking of Morecombe, what he would do, how he would behave were he with us, what my love for Florence had brought us both to,—for to be sure, I had been the innocent cause of her making this voyage, as she had been the cause of my coming; of what Aunt Damaris had said about it being too late to think of separating my darling and me now, and so on; pondering over a world of things in a short time as a man can, almost as fast as he dreams; till the noise of the pumps and some order bawled on the poop nearly over my head broke into my reverie and recalled me to myself.

The passengers had been wonderfully expeditious; they did not love shutting themselves up in their cabins now, even for five minutes; and when I re-entered the cuddy I found them all there, and Florence in the act of quitting her cabin. She had arrayed herself in a warm, turban-shaped hat, a jacket lined with fur, a dress of good thick material, and she carried a waterproof cloak over her arm. Aunt Damaris was swathed in the same remark-

able cloak she wore in the English Channel, the hood of it lying on her back ; what she wore under it I couldn't tell, but no doubt she looked after herself. When I next pulled out my watch it was five o'clock. The hours, one by one, had gone by quickly enough ; yet when I came to look back upon them all, they appeared to have made a fearfully long night. I knew by the erectness of the hull in the water, that there was now but little weight in the wind ; but I also knew by the inexpressible character of her rolling that she must be channels deep by this time, and that the order for us to leave her could not be much longer delayed. However, I was mightily comforted by feeling that there would be comparatively smooth water. All the time the pumps were kept going. It was like listening to the thumping and singing of engines. It made one wonder that human beings could maintain such labour as that ; but then we not only had a large crew, but gangs of 'tweendeck and steerage passengers had volunteered for the work, so that there was rest enough between whiles for the people.

Shortly after five, the steward and a couple of his mates arrived with hot coffee, biscuit, cold fowl, ham, and such matters ; and at the same time Daniel came down the companion ladder. He looked terribly haggard and worn, yet glanced round him with a brave smile, and not knowing,

maybe, that I had told them that we were to leave the ship at dawn, he said to the passengers: "This will be our last breakfast aboard the *Strathmore*. We have done our best to keep her afloat, but the steamer has knocked her into a basket, and she's bound to sink. The utmost we could do was to keep her on the surface till daylight enabled us to go to work to leave her quietly and without risk. The dawn'll be here very soon now; ladies and gentlemen, pray fall to—eat heartily. I assure you there is no danger; the sea is smooth, there is promise of a fine day, we shall find a refuge on St. Paul's Island, and the rest will be but a trifling tax on our patience."

The stewards seized the coffee-pots and went round the table filling the cups. The passengers were too wearied, too exhausted, they had talked over their situation too freely, to bother the captain with any questions. You'd notice that none of them would seat themselves at the table; and to an extent I could understand their superstitious recoil from doing at such a time as this the same as they had done when all was safe, and the brave ship was bearing them buoyantly over the seas. There are moments when one shrinks from custom, and you saw that shrinking now, as one or the other would go to the table and then return to his old place—the place he had occupied all night,—with a plate, and eat mechanically. After

great persuasion I induced Florence and her aunt to drink some hot coffee, and to take a bite. For myself, I made a good meal; I fancied I might come to feel the need of it presently, and I was resolved, if ever I was forced to give in, it should not be for the want of looking ahead and calculating that a very great deal might happen. Daniel also stowed a good meal away, but eat very hurriedly, and went on deck to send Mr. Thornton and the second mate below, before I had got half-way through the plateful I was pitching into. I did not notice how the others fared, giving all my attention to my darling and her aunt; but Mr. Thornton had not been five minutes below when, glancing at the skylight, I saw the grey dimness of dawn upon the glass; at the same moment the weary champing of the pumps ceased, and a loud voice shouted down the companion, "On deck, please, all the passengers!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST OF THE "STRATHMORE."

THIS was the cry I for one had been waiting the whole blessed night for, and when it came rattling down the hatchway in the hoarse, coarse voice of the third mate, there was a scramble among the most of us ; up bundled Captain Jackson and his wife, the Mortimers, the Joyces with their children, snatched in their arms and the nurse's, and Mr. Thompson Tucker. Mr. Thornton took charge of Mrs. O'Brien, and the second mate of Mrs. and Miss Grant. Then followed Aunt Damaris, Florence, and I ; and the doctor formed the tail of the terrified procession.

They had brought the maintopsail to the mast, and the ship was hove to. Over the port bow you saw the dawn sifting through the night-gloom like a light straining through oiled paper ; it brightened fast ; the line of the horizon was gradually hove up as the gathering irradiation ran the coil of it into the western darkness, till the whole surface

of the deep was a dull, dimly gleaming grey, with the pale heavens rising off its far stretches and soaring into a steely tint over the mastheads, where the morning light was shooting up to the zenith. There was wind enough to keep the canvas steady and no more; the swell of the sea had moderated, and there was scarce a glimpse of foam upon the ashen undulations; and this was one reason, maybe, why that ocean had the most desolate look that I ever beheld in the deep, as it coldly heaved under the bleak breaking of light in the east, and made a line like the sweep of a feather dipped in India-ink against the confused gloom of the sky in the west.

One could see the ship plain enough now, and it was like a shock to mark how deep she lay. The water seemed flush with her covering board, and every roll of her on the swell that came running out of the north-east hove over the rail of her top-gallant bulwarks to the surface of the sea; so that on the maindeck you might have washed your face in the ocean by putting your head at such moments over the side. But I had no leisure for more than a swift glance round. They had got tackles on the yardarms and were hoisting the long-boat out of the chocks to launch her. Hands were stationed at the falls of the quarter-boats and gig, and I saw that Daniel meant to do everything quickly and at once. He sung out to us to be

good enough to keep together until the boats were alongside, calling out to me, "Get the ladies into the gig when she's brought to the gangway, Seymour, then take your place in her, and the men who belong to your boat will join you." I looked aft, and cried to the fellows who were stationed at the gig, "Which gangway will you bring her to?" "Port gangway, sir," one of them answered. The order was then given to lower away the boats; they dropped into the water simultaneously, the men in them nimbly unhooking the fall blocks; and seizing Florence and Aunt Damaris each by the arm, I called out, "Shall we go on the maindeck, captain?" "Ay," he answered; and forthwith the three of us went down the poop ladder to the port gangway.

There was no confusion. They had got the long-boat over quickly and quietly, and were hauling her to the starboard gangway—both gangways being unshipped—at which stood half a dozen of the crew of the *Strathmore*, to prevent any man from entering the boat before the women who were to go in her had taken their places. I took notice, even in that time of hurry and pre-occupation, of the pale and worn appearance of the poor 'tween-deck people, both men and women, most of whom had stuck to the deck all night in their fear of the ship foundering if they went below; and it would have moved any man's heart to have seen them

there in their poverty, about to lose all that they had in the world—God knows little enough, yet precious to them as the fruits of pinching and self-denying ashore, to enable them to make this voyage: mothers hugging their infants, fathers standing in the midst of their little families, the brightening dawn striking cold and grey down betwixt the sails upon their gaunt, sorrowful, terrified faces. Oh, my lads, shipwreck is a fearful thing: how fearful only those who have undergone it know.

A couple of hands brought the gig to the gangway, two being in her. Mr. Thornton, from the break of the poop, sung out, "Be as sharp as you can, Mr. Seymour: we want that gangway." I took Florence by the arm, and, the men in the boat standing by to receive her, I waited till the swell brought the gig close, and then fairly lifted her into the hands of the two seamen. "Now, Miss Hawke," cried I. She hung back with a white face, and a kind of swooning roll of the eyes. But you only needed to feel the ship under your feet to understand that every moment was precious. "Have no fear," said I. "Why, we must be quick or the vessel will founder whilst you hesitate. Here, my lad, take the lady's arm;" and helped by the man I had called to, I raised the poor old lady clean off her feet, and watching for a chance, bundled her carefully into the arms of the men in

the boat. "Now then, boys, in with you!" I shouted to the two sailors who had brought the boat around. "Where's the bo'sun? Shilling!" I bawled, "where's Shilling?"

"Here, sir," he shouted, tumbling out of the crowd on the other side of the deck.

"You're to go along with me, Shilling, I think?" said I.

"Yes, sir."

"Then jump in."

He did so, I followed, the fellow in the bow shoved off, and we backed the boat to a distance of about ten times her length from the ship's side, and there waited.

The daylight was now broad. The sun had risen, but one saw nothing of him behind the pale brownish stretch of vapour that lay upon the face of the east, and that filled out into light blue sky overhead and in the west, streaked with clouds which shone white in the beams striking up at them from the hidden luminary. The languid breeze had gone round into the west, and as the breath of it came along, warm enough, it seemed to change the grey of the ocean into blue. There was every promise of a fine day; but the threat of a calm came to qualify the spirits it put into a man. Unless a steamer hove in sight we had no chance of being picked up if the wind died, nor could we make any progress towards the island

with the toil of rowing. I stood up to search the sea-line, running my eyes along it inch by inch, without seeing anything till I came to the *Strathmore*, the sight of which—for I had not looked at her before—was a real shock, and I sat down with my eyes upon her. Her port bow was towards us, and of her mutilated side, therefore, I could see nothing. But she was a complete wreck forward; nothing left but her bowsprit and foremast, the topmast and topsail yard with its sail lying across the forecastle, and the topgallantmast clean gone. The picture that she made, with the boats alongside of her and the people tumbling into them, was a sight fit to last a man a lifetime. Her painted ports were out of sight under water; her main-deck bulwarks were a dark line, with the poop and topgallant forecastle at either end rising up, and preserving still something of the old aspect of the hull. She stood like a half-tide rock there, barely yielding to the light swell that ran its sparkling volumes along her sides. Oh, it was a pity, it was a pity! to look at those two stately masts which still stood, at the symmetrical black lines of the shrouds and backstays, at the white canvas of the topsails, foresail, and topgallantsail, at the furled sails lying like snow on the black royal yards, at the stern windows catching the blue gleam off the sea that washed up close under them, at the dull tremor of light in the brasswork,

the tremble of radiance coming you knew not from where in the bright yellow masts—I say to look at that sight and watch the smoke breaking from the galley chimney, and hear the pigs squeaking and the cocks crowing, and the voices of the mates urging the people to make haste, and then reflect that that gallant fabric, crowded with valuable freight, that that brave vessel with its sumptuous cabins in which one had lived and slept for weeks whilst the noble keel was furrowing the waters of three mighty oceans, would shortly vanish and be no more than one of those clouds floating over us when the sun had sucked up its vapour, caused one's very heart to shrink in one's breast.

With a couple of oars over, the gig kept her position, and we in her sat looking at the ship and the people leaving her, never speaking. Florence and her aunt occupied the stern sheets on either hand of me. The men crouched upon the thwarts, and it was strange to see how identical was the gaze they fastened upon the sinking vessel. Presently we heard a muffled cheer given on the starboard side of the ship, and the boatswain said “The captain'll have left her, sir—he'll have been the last man.” It was strange that such a shout as this should have been sent up, but somehow Englishmen have a habit of cheering, and most often they don't know why they do it. In a few minutes we saw the long-boat backing clear of the

vessel's stern ; she was followed by the other boats, and they came to a halt in a cluster upon the sea about fifty fathoms clear of the ship. We rowed towards them, and when we were close Daniel stood up in the long boat.

"Seymour," he called out, "we'll wait to see the last of her. Ladies, you must keep up your courage. You are in charge of a sailor."

Florence smiled wanly ; Aunt Damaris hid her face in her hands.

"What'll be the true course, Captain Thompson ?" I called, giving him his title before all those people.

"Due south," he answered. "The distance, as close as I can reckon it, will be within eighty miles. You'll be able to guess your rate of sailing, Seymour, and if we should part company, haul to the norrard if you don't sight the island after having made that distance, for you may be sure you've missed it."

I waved my hand to signify assent.

"I'll lead the way," he continued, "and you and the others will stick to my skirts whilst wind and weather permit. I'll hoist two lanterns at my masthead, which will tell you where I am when it comes dark. Every boat will show a light at her masthead."

I inquired if we had the means of showing a light, and was told by one of the men that there

was a small lantern in the bows, along with a can of oil.

"Keep a bright lookout for ships, Seymour," cried Daniel, and having no further instructions to give me, he sat down.

I glanced from one living freight to another; the boats looked crowded, especially the long-boat, yet they were not loaded above their capacity. The excitement of leaving the ship was too fresh, perhaps, to suffer the influence of those deep and wild and passionate feelings which come to people in our situation to make itself felt. I thought I could see an expression of mingled bewilderment and awe in most of the faces which gleamed over the low gunwales, as if stupefaction were slowly yielding to thrilling wonderment; as though, as the ship sunk her sides deeper and deeper, she left room in the souls of the watchers for the reception of the fearful immensity of the ocean in whose heart they were floating. The murmur of people talking came from every boat, with the wailing of a baby, or the call of one member of a divided family to another. You'd notice the tendency of the sea to separate us; how subtly it would sneak one boat's head off round to west and another to north, meantime insensibly widening the intervals till their crews threw over a couple of oars to bring the little craft into a cluster afresh.

"Why are we waiting here?" asked Aunt

Damaris, in a voice that seemed to give her pain to use.

"The captain wants to see the last of his ship," I replied. "The delay is of little consequence. The presence of that ship breaks the fall of those poor ignorant people there from the security of her decks to their present situation; they will be fitter to bear the loneliness of the sea by the time she has gone, than had she vanished immediately after they had entered the boats."

"Can I say a word to you, sir?" exclaimed the boatswain, who was sitting with his back against the mast which the men had stepped whilst she was being hauled to the gangway.

"Certainly," I replied; and perceiving that he wanted me to go to him, I got up. "What is it, Shilling?"

"Only this, sir," said he, in a hoarse whisper; "am I to go on a-callin' of ye Egerton, or is Seymour now the word? I heerd the captain call you Seymour."

"Oh!" said I, "you may call me Seymour now. The skipper blowed the gaff last night in his worry, and the murder's out, Jim."

"Right," said he, "and Seymour it is." On which I returned to my place.

Scarcely a quarter of an hour had passed since we left the ship when she foundered. All that while it was wonderful to me that she should float,

for she was so deep that the line of the water was above the channel dead-eyes, and little more was visible of her than her fore-castle rail and her poop, slightly rising towards the taffrail. We in the gig were all looking at her when one of the men sung out, "There she goes!" and she went down head foremost slowly, lifting her counter well out as if she were pitching over a heavy surge; the sun at that instant came swelling out of the misty canopy in the east in a burst of glorious radiance, sailing fair into a space of blue which it made a dazzling light of; the blinding beam struck deep into the ocean, and rolled up to the ship on the brows of the swells in a fan-shaped wake of silver glory: and amid this wonder of liquid effulgence the ship went down. You saw the rush of the expelled air from her hold setting the water boiling as her decks sank into it. She buried her bowsprit, but after the hull had vanished with a flash of sunlight off her wet stern windows and counter, she righted, and her masts stood up true and defiant, and then the maintopsail was sucked down, and the topgallantsail followed, and then the royal yard, and for the space of a breath you saw the red vane at the royal masthead flickering like a flame in the slant of a swell that was shadowed by its brow, and when next you looked there was the great ocean heaving into the heavens, and nothing to break the frightful continuity of the liquid girdle

but the staring white shoulders of clouds low down in the north, and the greyness in the east thinning out into blue sky under the sun.

Florence shivered, and I whispered a few words of encouragement to her. When the ship was gone they raised a faint cheer in the quarter-boat in charge of the second mate, but all the others witnessed the departure in dead silence. The long-boat then hoisted her sail, the rest did the same, and placing the small compass I had found in the boat at my feet, I gathered up the yolk-lines whilst the boat-swain hauled the sheet of the little lugsail aft, and headed the gig due south in the wake of the long-boat. The breeze was about south-west by west, very light, little more than a draught indeed. I thought, by the appearance of the swell, that it would haul to the eastward later on, and perhaps come on a fresh wind. Our boat was a six-oared gig, long and narrow; I forget her exact dimensions, but stem and stern she'd fairly cover the whole length of the *Strathmore's* taffrail when she hung at the stern davits. She was, indeed, the captain's boat, used by him for going ashore when at anchor in port, and was a handsome little craft, fitted with brass rowlocks, gratings, and so forth; and a stout short mast that stepped very securely, and a brand new bit of a lugsail. There had been stowed in her bows two breakers or small water-casks, and under the stern-sheets (for there were

no lockers) several tins of preserved meat with a knife for opening them, some tin cases of biscuit such as was eaten in the cuddy, a small bag of ship's bread, several bottles of wine and spirits, a large piece of cooked salt beef rolled up in canvas, and a few other eatables the nature of which I forget. Used moderately, I reckoned that for nine of us there were provisions and water sufficient to last us about a week.

We had not been sailing ten minutes when I found the gig the fastest of the boats. The two lifeboats lagged most; the long-boat, though a clumsy round-bowed craft, with the beam of a Dutchman, held her own with the other two quarter-boats; but the gig slipped through the water so fast that, to keep astern of the long-boat, we had again and again to slacken away the sheet. To encourage one another, they tried some singing in the long-boat; but it would not do; only a few fell into it, and the sound of their voices coming along to us over the swell, I thought that a more sorrowful thing had never met my ears, and was glad when they stopped the sad attempt. There was not enough heave in the water to throw us out of sight of one another in the hollows whilst we kept together, and one could always see the swarm of white faces glimmering over the gun-wales with the white sky beyond, and the ocean-line rising and falling past them as the boats rose

and sank. Now and again you'd notice a figure stand up, shading his eyes, and peer slowly round. Sailor man as I had been in my day, it made me recoil at times to glance away from those boats into the 'infinite distance in the west and north, and then gaze over the side at the mighty surface in which I could have immersed my arm to its elbow without leaning. It's the *nearness* of the sea in an open boat that gives one the first great shock, after quitting the height of a ship's deck. You get used to it in time, but it takes time; and whilst the thing is fresh, I tell you it will put terrible feelings into some men's minds. Why, when you look over and see the gleam of your face within hand-reach, it's like peering into your grave and seeing your own body there; and down past the reflection goes your fancy, sucked deep by the spell of the blue profundity, down through the clear obscure of it that is like molten glass, till the imagination touching the bottom of that mighty universe, and blindly groping there among the black and blind miracles of vegetation, and valleys, and mountains, and shapeless monsters, and sightless leviathans, leaps back in affright to your heart, making it cold as stone, and with a wild shudder you look up at the sun and pray to Almighty God for succour.

"When do you think we shall reach the island, Mr. Seymour?" asked Aunt Damaris.

“Why, by this time to-morrow I hope we shall all be ashore on it,” I replied ; “unless, which will be better, we are picked up by a passing vessel.”

“There ought to be no lack of them hereabouts, sir,” exclaimed Shilling.

“We’re a trifle too far to the south’ard perhaps,” I replied : “though I don’t know, it is not unusual for vessels bound to the east’ard to sight St. Paul’s, and we’re north of that island, at present, anyway.”

“It’ll be a bitter long night,” said Florence, with a frightened look around the sea.

“Keep up, keep up, my sweet one,” I murmured in a low voice, bending towards her. “Before the night comes, the whole day must pass, and the long hours of sunlight *may* bring us succour.” And I fell to caressing her hand.

Aunt Damaris threw back the hood of her cape, for the sunshine was gushing down warmly, and the temperature of the gentle breeze was that of a woman’s breath. She had dropped that old pecking motion of her lean face I wrote of a while gone. Shipwreck had made another character of her indeed ; she was as subdued and tearful as she had before been acid and aggressive. Whenever she addressed me, her manner was what you would expect to find in a person who was under a deep obligation to another, and who never could speak to him without thinking of it ; I scarcely know how else to illustrate her anxiety to show that she

liked me, that she pinned her faith to me, that, in short, she counted upon my saving her life. Whenever I would turn from Florence to her, after speaking softly with my darling, I'd get a look from the old lady that was as good as saying I had won her niece, *she* was not going to interfere, I had nothing to fear from *her*, all that I had to do now was to save their lives, and then go and get married. I could not be mistaken; there's more meaning in a single look than in a power of words very often: and Aunt Damaris's thoughts couldn't have been plainer to me had she turned to and spent an hour in talking them out to me. The worry, the fear, the long sleeplessness of the past night had done her appearance no good. She was as yellow as a guinea; her eyes hazy; the hollows under them a dark violet; her cheekbones stood up high and bare; and when she looked at me full, it was like a face in a spoon that reflects the nose forward and stretches the cheeks sharp back to the ears. There was no such change as this in my love. Weary and heavy-eyed somewhat she was indeed; and her lips' rosiness had faded just a little, and the wonderful white of her beautiful throat seemed to have overspread her face; but her loveliness was upon her then as it always had been, and so far as my impassioned eyes could see, the only change that our trouble had worked in her was what you'd notice in a lily that has drooped; there was no

loss of sweetness, but just a languid leaning in the exquisite white flower. A grace in *her* you may reckon it was in my sight, seeing that it was *I*, mates, whom she had chosen to support her, and cherish her, and preserve her.

Preserve her! I felt the mighty obligation in a manner that was fit to crush my spirits, when I glanced from the appealing loveliness of her eyes to the measureless blue liquid waste along which we were creeping. I could not flatter myself that if the night came down dark with wind, that we should be able to keep the other boats company; and lightly as Daniel had sung out to me to head to the norrard if, after reckoning we had traversed eighty miles of water, I should find no island heaving in view, it was a fearful thing to contemplate missing that speck of a rock, and having to cruise about for it without sextant or chart, in a small open boat in the midst of the hugest of all the oceans, if you calculate that waste of water to start from the South American cape and to end where Australia begins. Such thoughts as these would set me looking at the men. There were six of them, counting Shilling, and they were all Englishmen, which, to be sure, was a good job. Two of the five were ordinary seamen, youngish, burned-up fellows, and the other three hairy, able-bodied chaps; all of them variously dressed; one in blue jersey and coat, another in a red shirt, the

bo'sun in a sleeved waistcoat, a fourth in sea-boots and a yellow sou'wester, and so on. Every man of them had a quid of tobacco in his cheek, and now and again one or another would spit over the side, and watch the yellow salival froth go astern just to guess our speed, and then give a slow twist round on the thwart to have a look at the other boats, and a squint at the weather to windward. At the first set-off I'd find them peering at me critically, as if it bothered them to understand how a passenger had been put in charge of a boat over the bo'sun's head. I took note of this at the time, but it was not until we had been sailing along for an hour, that it came into my head to speak to them.

"My lads," said I, "has the bo'sun told you who I am?"

"No, they know nothing about it, Mr. Seymour," responded the bo'sun.

"Well," said I, "as your lives have been committed to my charge, it's proper I should tell you that I knocked off the sea three years ago, when I was second mate, with a chief mate's certificate in my pocket, after having had seven and a half years of it in the employ to which the *Strathmore* belonged."

"That's quite right, mates," exclaimed the bo'sun. "Ye're in good hands. Mr. Seymour and I are old shipmates. It took me aback to see him aboard the *Strathmore* in the river. I

reckoned he had come to sling his hammock afresh, the land not yielding him weevils enough, and the likes of such delicacies."

The men grinned, and one of them said, "No fear, sir, we shall be all right along with you."

"Oh, then, Mr. Seymour, you knew the bo'sun before?" exclaimed Aunt Damaris, looking at him with interest.

"Yes, he and I served aboard the same ship," said I. "Jim, I am glad you are with me, old shipmate. I know you of old—up and down like a yard of pump-water, Shilling; and you're here to put me right if I go wrong."

"No fear of your going wrong, sir," answered the bo'sun heartily. "Ladies, it's not for me to speak with the gentleman himself a listenin'; but if there's aught to be done in the way of saving life by coolness and courage, and the knowledge of a British seaman, then all I can say is the gentleman that Captain Thompson has put this here boat in charge of is the rightest of the few right parties that was in our dead and gone ship who could ha' been chosen for such a job—onless, indeed, the long-shore life he's been a followin' of for the last three years, 'cordin' to his own account, has spoiled him,—which *I'm* not one as thinks."

He delivered this speech with his eyes fixed on Aunt Damaris, as if the honest fellow had it in his mind to give me a hand in other ways than that of

steering and handling the gig. I shook my head at him as if I should say "A *little* too thick, Jim—but thanks all the same;" and the old lady exclaimed, "I know quite enough of Mr. Seymour to believe all that you say of him. I pray that God may enable him to deliver us from this awful situation."

"Amen, ma'am, to that," said the bo'sun; while one of the men near him growled out, "Same here, *I'm* sure."

The breeze continued very light but steady in the west. The boats kept fairly well together, within a circle whose diameter would be about half a mile. As the sun climbed up the sky, the dazzle came off sharp from the blue swell, and the glory of the orb's light hung like a haze upon the north-east sea, where you saw the near horizon undulating through it like the folds of a huge snake, till it came out clear into a liquid azure, brightly ruled against the heavens in the south and west where groups of clouds, with snowlike bosoms bulging forth, hung low with a gleam of the water between them and us, and over them a sky shining dimly among a fringe of vapour that spread like feathers right across the dome, their tips pointing south-west. One could hear them talking in the long-boat sometimes, though we were to windward. There was nothing strange in the sound, since you saw where it came from; but there were moments

when I'd find a kind of puzzlement stealing over me on glancing from the vacant leagues of blue on my right to the sea on the port beam and quarter, and seeing the boats there. Disaster can never be so long in coming but that, when it arrives at last, it bewilders a man. The change from the *Strathmore*, with her white length of decks, her cabins, her shelter, the life of her as you found it when looking along at the people who swarmed forward and on her forecastle, to a small open boat, was violent enough to make one slow in getting used to it.

So languid was the breeze, that our rate of sailing was little more than two and a half miles an hour, and many a yearning glance would I cast over the swell that sparkled in the wake of the sun, for it would be a grand thing if the breeze came on to blow with weight in it out of the north, and drive us swiftly over this calm sea, and show us St. Paul's Island fair over the bows at daybreak next morning. I said as much to Florence, who asked me if I knew what sort of place that island was.

"No," I replied, "I was never ashore upon it."

"Is it inhabited?" asked Aunt Damaris.

"I can't tell you," said I. "I fancy whalers call there occasionally to boil down their oil and to fill their casks with rain water which collects in hollows on top of the rocks. It's an extinct volcano, I believe."

"Oh, gracious!" cried the old lady: "what a place to seek refuge on!"

"Any of you men know St. Paul's Island?" I asked.

They shook their heads; they had heard of it, but couldn't recollect ever having sighted it.

"To be wrecked on a desert island," said I to Florence, "is something to boast of. It'll make a heroine of you when you get ashore."

"Oh, Jack, shall we ever reach the shore?" she exclaimed, looking past me into the dim blue distance.

"Of course we shall," I replied. "All we have to do is to reach the little island, and amuse ourselves with studying its structure until a ship arrives to carry us back to Clifton."

"To Clifton!" cried Aunt Damaris. "You mean to Australia."

"What does it matter," said I, "so long as it's a place where there are railways and steamboats?"

"You never thought of *this* part, Jack," said Florence, heartening up a bit and stealing her hand into mine, "when you made up your mind to follow me."

"My darling, a good deal worse than this would not have stopped me."

"What a mercy you came!" exclaimed Aunt Damaris: "I for one am sure I should not have known what to do without you."

"You are very kind to say that, Miss Hawke. So far, I have been of little enough use. But I will do my best. You remember what I said to you on board the *Strathmore*? If your lives are only to be preserved at the expense of mine, you'll find no hesitation in me. My darling here is first, and you are next; and I am grateful to you for making me feel that I would undergo more than I should care to say for your sake, from respect and liking for you; for there was a time Miss Hawke, when I believed you would never regard me as a friend, but on the contrary as a vulgar-minded young sailor chap who had broken rudely in upon your brother's family——"

She grasped my hand, forcing me to tauten the yoke-line till the boat swerved to it. "Mr. Seymour," she mumbled in my ear, "if you have the least pity for me, say no more on that subject. I opposed you because I did not know you; you have tricked me for nearly three months, and let that satisfy you. I know you now, and I consider my niece fortunate in having such a lover."

This brought a blush into my darling's face. The men, talking among themselves, did not heed us, nor could they have heard us in any case. I squeezed the old lady's hand in the fulness of my heart, and then let go of it to attend to the boat; and not quite to change the subject, but to carry it away a bit from its personal tone, I spoke of

Clifton, wondered what my relatives and the Hawkes were doing at that time, reminded Florence of the anthem in Bristol Cathedral, and, one thing leading on to another, I gradually slipped into something like a full relation to Aunt Damaris of my courtship at Clifton, telling her of the first occasion of my meeting with Florence ; of the girlish kindly part played in the business by my cousins ; of what my aunt thought of it ; how my uncle was not to blame, as Mr. Hawke had imagined ; how I had *not* insulted Mr. Hawke, but had merely objected to his ordering me to leave Bristol, and so on. The old lady listened with close attention. She seemed to forget our situation whilst she nodded and broke in upon my story with such exclamations as "Perfectly natural !" "Most ill-advised on my brother's part." "Your aunt showed a proper neighbourly feeling," and the like ; whipping out, when I explained the nature of Mr. Hawke's interview with me in my lodgings, that he had given her a very different version of the story ; but he was foolishly prejudiced, as she had been indeed, in favour of "that wretched Mr. Morecombe" (her own words). Florence followed my narrative with close interest too, pressing my hand, which she retained, whenever I came to any part that particularly concerned her or my own love for her. We were in a queer situation for such talk as that ; but the men were spinning yarns to one another as

they sat with folded arms smoking their pipes ; we were bound to converse too, and to Florence and me at all events no subject could be fuller of interest than the one I had lighted upon. And never was the wish for life, the desire for years in the future, stronger upon me than whilst I talked, finding the most gracious encouragement you could imagine in the lean yellow face of the old lady, and looking from her to my love nestled at my side, with the faint blue of the heavens reflected in the tender, luminous, loving eyes she kept fixed upon me, and her hair glittering under her hat against the huge and lonely background of ocean that softly came in swells out of the wonderful liquid distance.

CHAPTER VII.

LAND-HO !

I SHOULD only be tedious to give you, fact by fact, the passage of that day. I thought it would never end. I'd sometimes look at the sun and fancy he was under a spell and meant to stop where he was, so long he took to reach the meridian and so tedious was his descent. At noon by my watch we opened a tin of meat and made a meal. There were no plates nor knives and forks ; and I had to serve out the meat by digging it up from the tin with a sheath-knife that one of the seamen handed to me. I placed a couple of cubes of it on two cuddy biscuits, and persuaded Florence and her aunt to eat. A drink of water was then passed round, but as there was only one vessel for that purpose—a tin pannikin—and as it went against me to think of my darling putting her lips to such a sea-goblet as that, I knocked off the head of a bottle of wine, leaving the cork in, which did very well as a glass for my pet and her aunt.

It fell a dead calm soon after the hour of noon ; the swell ran very softly, like quicksilver, with a shadow of blue that looked to glide off its summits as the folds rolled forward. Hot it would have been at that hour had the sun showed a clear disk, but all the morning a sort of haze that was neither fog nor cloud had been working up over the sky, making the blue of it so dim that it was difficult to tell it from the palest green, with patches of motionless cloud hanging under it, so that the sun was just a blazing shapeless blot, resembling liquid fire oozing through a hole in the sky and forming a burning golden pool up there. Nevertheless, long before this hour Florence had thrown off her warm jacket, and Aunt Damaris her wonderful cloak, and I my pilot-cloth coat (begging pardon for being in my shirt sleeves), and the bo'sun his sleeved waist-coat. When the calm fell we put a couple of oars out to draw near to the long-boat, as I wished to consult Daniel : thinking it a pity that, since we had but sixty or seventy odd miles to measure, we did not take to rowing so as to make the most of this smooth water and fine weather. We approached close, and I put the point to Daniel. He stood up to answer me, and it was a moving sight, I can tell you, to see the crowd of faces all looking at us—men, women, and children—with several pairs of eyes gleaming under the foot of the lug.

“It’s not only that we’re too crowded for rowing,” answered Daniel, “but our boat’s too heavy to do anything with her in that way that’ll be serviceable. We’re not like you, Seymour—a smart little gig; our oars are pretty nearly sweeps, and there’s no use putting my people to galley-slaves’ work.”

The truth of this struck me when I looked at his large, deep, full-bowed crowded boat, and waving my hand, I sung out, “You’re right, captain; it would be galley-slaves’ work with you.”

He exclaimed: “*You* can take to your oars if you like. We don’t want to detain you; but I’d rather the boats should keep together so long as it’s possible for them to do so.”

I replied that I had no intention of parting company, and so our brief colloquy came to an end. But it was idle, trying work sitting upon that heaving, burnished surface watching the boats swinging over it, with two of the quarter-boats astern fading out in the brassy glare of the sun upon the water. Our patience, however, was not long tested; it was about three o’clock in the afternoon when, looking up at the sky, I perceived a drifting of the clouds away towards the south-west; and soon afterwards, whilst standing up to peer around the horizon for any sign of a ship, I spied the water dark in the north-east quarter; and within twenty minutes the boats were pushing

forwards again before a merry breeze that whipped the ocean afresh into blue, putting feathers of foam into the curl of what was little more than ripples, and cleansing the heavens somewhat, though there were clouds on the sea-line to windward with a look about them that made me think the breeze would freshen as the sun declined.

The unequal sailing powers of our little squadron were again shown ; we had to tie a reef in our lug-sail to enable us to keep abreast of the long-boat, and ease off our sheet until the sail was blowing forward like a flag whenever she did, to allow the other boats to overhaul us. Regularly, every hour, I would make an entry in my note-book of the number of miles we had progressed during that time, always taking care to have opinions of the seamen before settling our speed to my own satisfaction. But when six o'clock came, what with the calm, and our having to slow down for the other boats, I found that at sundown we were still a full fifty-five marine miles from the island of St. Paul's, supposing Daniel's calculations of our distance to have been correct ; so that if we increased our speed to seven or eight miles an hour we should fetch the island in the dark, before day-break, if we did not miss it.

My anxiety now began. Whilst the daylight remained abroad, and the breeze was moderate, and the sea smooth, there was no cause for un-

easiness ; but I felt a wild kind of worry come into me when the sun set with a freshening wind and a growing sea, and when I thought of plumping into the island in the blackness, not being able to see where to land, with a heavy surf, perhaps, roaring round it, and with surges too heavy to make it possible for a small open boat to keep an offing. The sun's lower limb was upon the water when, being within hail of the long-boat, the others nearly a mile in our wake, I exchanged a farewell sentence or two with Daniel. I shouted, " I make our distance fifty-five miles to St. Paul's."

" That's right," he cried ; " our reckoning tallies."

" I'll endeavour to keep your lights in sight," I bawled ; " if we are parted, God bless you and preserve us all ! "

The whole of her people answered with a cheer which we returned ; and as the echo of it died in our throats the sun sank behind the sea, and the night came out of the east like a shadow you could watch the progress of, with a star shining wanly deep down in it. Though the wind was north—having now veered due north—and should have been warm, it seemed, when the sun was gone, to take an edge as shrewd and bleak as the southerly breeze last night had brought with it. The bo'sun was steering the boat, and, sitting on the aftermost thwart, I picked up my darling's jacket and put it

on her, and wrapped up Aunt Damaris in her cloak. I then secured their waterproof garments around them both, leaving them to keep their places in the sternsheets for the present, though they would have to come out of that if the sea continued to rise, as it would need the broad shoulders of the seamen to bolster the surges for us. The darkness deepened as the evening advanced. There was no moon, and, God preserve us! as I looked aloft I saw we were to have another black night. Presently, the two small globular lanterns aboard the long-boat were hoisted at the masthead, where they winked and skipped like will-o'-the-wisps as the clumsy little craft tumbled and wallowed as she ran. The lights of the other boats twinkled fitfully astern, the hindermost of them scarce visible; ours was still wanting, so I told one of the men to get it lighted and hoisted; but suddenly the bo'sun said, "Mr. Seymour, how are we to steer, sir? The glimmer the white card made has gone off it."

"Is that the only lantern in the boat?" I asked.

"That's all, sir," answered the seaman.

"Then," said I, "we must use it for the compass, that's certain. Captain Thompson's bound to guess why we don't regularly exhibit it, though from time to time one of you can hold it up for a few minutes."

"Will there be any extra danger if we don't

show it, Mr. Seymour?" cried Aunt Damaris, who, so far as I could make out in the dusk, had grabbed hold of the gunwale with one hand, and was turning her head from side to side in terror of the seas which she watched rolling after us.

"None whatever," I replied. "The sole object of the light is to let Captain Thompson know we are keeping him company. It is meant to reassure him so far as we are concerned. But so long as we can see his lights, we shall know where he is, and that's all we need mind."

We were sailing at about five and a half miles an hour. There was quite enough sea on to oblige us to watch the boat with the utmost narrowness and care. Far as the eye could stretch, the ocean was a great weltering shadow, a kind of liquid gloom that would look to be throbbing all over when a surge hove us up and gave us a view of the dark scene. But near at hand the foam ran white and broad; every wave that chased us carried its burden of snow for a space through the dusk, and would seem to fling it after us in spite when the slanting reeling rush of the gig left the ebony hillock to sink exhausted in her wake. There was not a clear space of sky to be seen, not a star; now and again at that hour we could catch sight of the twin lanterns of the long-boat, but it was a hard job to make sure of them as they showed above or vanished behind the black ridges whose hollows

would sink us several feet below the sea-level, for the water was full of phosphorus all around us. Sometimes a wave would arch over and break into a stream of fire, the foam of it resembling boiling water. There were flashes of the wild green light in every running shadow; it drove away in revolving clouds astern of us, and it sparkled against the sky in the crests of the surges when our low boat slipped into a trough. These sharp gleams confounded the eye, and over and over again I would mistake them for the lights of the long-boat. As to the other lanterns, there was no sight of them to be had at all. I was willing to suppose they were used by the people to steer by, as mine was; but in any case, wherever the boats might be, it was certain before two hours of the darkness had passed that we had left them far astern; and the last we saw of the long-boat was the feeble glimmer of her lamps a long long stretch away down upon our port quarter.

But there was no stopping now: the freshening wind had raised a sea that was as dangerous to us as if it had been twice as heavy; and we should have stood to fill the boat had we slackened an inch of the sheet or reduced our pace to let the others come up. I caused Aunt Damaris and Florence to sit in the bottom of the boat forward of the aftermost thwart, where their bodies would find some shelter, whilst the weight of them being

low was the better for us all ; and I made two of the seamen come aft and sit one on either side the bo'sun, who was still at the helm, telling them to keep a bright lookout over the stern for the seas, and if they saw one coming that was likely to tumble upon us, to put their shoulders against the bo'sun's and make a breakwater of their backs. The other men I ordered to keep crouched down forward, as to trim the boat properly we did not want all the weight aft. Meanwhile I posted myself close to the compass, on which I kept my eye, holding my darling's hand for the endearment of it and that she might find encouragement in the grasp, and incessantly reassuring both her and her aunt as heartily as I could. Sometimes I'd pipe out a scrap of sea-song, specially when the swing of an extra heavy sea would send us rushing like an arrow upwards and forwards, and then leave us in the calm of a hollow full of the noise of hissing and crackling spume, with the wail of the wind over our heads ; for these would be terrifying moments to Florence and her aunt and alarming enough to the others of us, let me tell you, my lads ; so that it was a kind of relief to myself, however it might hearten the rest, to shout out, "Cease, rude Boreas !" or "Loud roar'd the dreadful Thunder," or "Dublin Bay," or some old song of that kind. The bo'sun invariably joined in when I thus let fly, and would follow on with such

exclamations as "Hurrah, boys! she's got the scent!" "Go it, old bucket! smoke and hum—strain your lovely timbers—jump, you little devil! jump! hurrah, boys—this is proper sailing!"

Well, it was by God's blessing that the wind was a following one, for it not only qualified us to steer a true course, but it enabled us by running to take half the weight out of it. We could have done nothing with it had it drawn ahead; the utmost we could have attempted would be to ride to our oars and take our chance of being rolled over; but with a single reef in our lug and the fresh wind blowing dead over the stern the long, slender, shallow boat swept along like a little comet, topping the seas as if the bit of canvas that dragged at her mast lifted the keel out of it at every jump, the bo'sun holding her true as a hair to her course. The edge of the sense of danger was a trifle turned by the deep feeling of excitement that was put into one. Our speed was never more than six knots, but she looked to be going twelve, for the nearer you are to the water the faster your motion through it will appear; and the foam swept by in a manner to keep one thrilled. The water blazed around us; the black ridge astern broke into a shining: then "Look out, lads, now!" I'd shout; and the boat's stern would be run up and the whole little fabric hurled forward till she'd feel to be standing end on; then, as the incline of the

sea squared its summit under her, she'd hang fair on a level keel with the full weight of the blast in her sail and the sea weltering and flashing all around, whilst behind you'd see the fiery trail of the wake racing into the airy blackness as if burning oil had been poured over the side, and a moment after down she would sink her stern whilst the dark hill ran roaring away ahead, till there'd come a lull, and you'd notice bits of foam glittering with light blowing out from the sea past the mast, and shining like the gleams of a green lantern upon a dark wall.

During most of that long, trying, perilous night my belief is that poor Aunt Damaris was more dead than alive. I'd hear Florence encouraging her, for *her* spirit shone out bravely after a bit as if she had only needed time to shake her mind free of the terror that had been worked in her by the sinking of the ship and the fearful nearness of the swelling sea to us in that open boat; and the sweetest bit of flattery that ever fell on my ear was a speech of hers to the old lady, in which she spoke of me as a sailor in words I ought not to repeat, whilst she added that she felt as safe with me as if we were on dry land, and thanked God that I had followed her to sea, for she was sure they would end in owing their lives to me. She could not imagine I overheard her; I had been talking to the bo'sun just before, and a stormy noise came out of

the washing and rolling of the surges; but they were sitting low down in the boat where there was little wind to scatter the bell-like notes of my loved one's voice, and I happened to stoop to get a sight of the compass at the bo'sun's foot, and so I overheard her. What did she know of me as a sailor? But it was her love that gave her confidence in me, and the melody of her tones was not clearer than the note of pride in the words in which she boasted of me to her aunt. There was no chance of their getting any rest. There was no room for them to lie down. Before relieving Jim Shilling at the helm, I induced them both to drink some wine and eat a biscuit. I leaned over the thwart and talked to them, asking if their posture cramped them. No! they could manage very well as they were; I was not to trouble about them, but to give my whole thoughts to the boat.

"Does the sea grow heavier?" asked Aunt Damaris in a manner that, as I have said, made me suspect that for most of the time she was a good deal nearer dead than alive.

"No," I replied, "thank God the wind remains steady. It would be no more than a fine sailing breeze for the *Strathmore*, but it's a gale for her gig."

"Only keep the water from coming in!" moaned the poor old lady.

"So far, none has come in, aunt; and it's won-

derful, Jack, how you and the men have managed to keep the waves from rolling in to us," said Florence, whose face I could just catch the glimmer of from the lantern light striking up from where it was placed in the bottom of the boat, near the compass, right along under the thwarts.

"Shilling handles her nobly," said I. "I must relieve him in a minute; he has had two hours of it, and I dare not trust the others."

"Can *you* steer as well as the boatswain, Mr. Seymour?" tremulously cried Aunt Damaris.

"Oh, I hope so. If I doubted myself, I'd leave him where he is. My darling!" I exclaimed, lifting and kissing Florence's hand, "what more can I do to comfort you and your aunt? It breaks my heart to see you in such a position as this. Are you cold, my own?"

"No," she replied; "thanks to these warm clothes which are due to your foresight, Jack. Aunt, dear, are you cold?"

"No—but it's a long long night, and the motion is enough to turn one's brain!" exclaimed Aunt Damaris. "Oh, *when* do you think we shall reach land, Mr. Seymour?"

"Why, if we continue at this pace, at six o'clock to-morrow morning," I answered. "Not sooner, I hope, for I want to make the land before fetching it."

"What time is it now?"

I held my watch to the lamp, and said, "A quarter past eleven."

"Oh!" cried the poor old body, "then we are to have seven hours more of this!"—uttering which she appeared to collapse and said no more, though I heard my darling striving to rally her.

I told the boatswain I would take a spell at the helm, and he was glad to be relieved, for the job of steering that boat was a terrible strain upon the attention, and two hours of it were as hard as six hours at a ship's wheel. We watched for a smooth chance, and then swiftly exchanged places. I told him to serve out some brandy to the men, for there were several bottles of that liquor in the boat, and likewise a meal of bread and preserved meat, and I also whispered to him to talk to the ladies and strive his best to hearten them up; and to this business he fell, after eating and drinking, very briskly indeed. I'd hear his voice rumbling, with a hearty laugh breaking from him often, as he leaned over the thwart talking, with his back to me; and he brought the two men forward into the talk too, constantly referring to Bob or Bill for confirmation of what he was saying, so that there was no lack of "Ay, ay!" "True for you, mate!" "That's the time o' day, miss; it's gospel true all what the bo'sun's a saying!" and so forth.

But my attention was sufficiently engrossed, as you may suppose. I had handled boats in my time

under various conditions of weather, but never had such work as this fallen to my share before. It kept me breathless ; every nerve in me was screwed up till the wind as it poured against my back seemed to pass clean through me with a shriek. The least inattention, the least neglect to help her, as she was swung up to the top of a sea and appeared to pause there looking down, would have filled her out of hand. The wildest times were when the surges broke under her and the smother of the froth was flush with the gunwale ; then the rudder seemed to have no grip ; it was like floating in foam with the keel sheer out of the solider element ; and whenever she drove clear of the mess, and I felt the heavy poising of the clear black water under her planks, a kind of bursting sigh would go out of my heart. The sweat poured from my face, and I had not been ten minutes with the yoke-lines taut in my fists when I felt, through the perspiration that soaked my underclothes, as if I were sitting in a bath. I wonder I did not put a kink into my neck when I recall the manner in which the sight of the black hills looming up on a sudden out of the windy gloom on either quarter kept me stretching it. I sat with my teeth locked, and could feel the veins upon my forehead standing out hard under the skin like whipcord. Boys, could you expect the bo'sun to have suffered as I did ? He had had his share of it, as you'd have

known by the glad alacrity with which he surrendered the helm to me ; but when I took hold of the yoke-lines I knew that the life of my sweetheart lay in those bits of white stuff ; and that alone made me much less fit for the job than he. Why, the thoughts that came into me made a long agony of that steering. I'd think of a sea tumbling into the boat and washing us out of her ; my darling's drowning shriek for me to save her ; the short, fierce swimming-battle in search of her. These would be my fancies as I'd lean forward with a swift glance at the compass and a long look, which I knew to be as fierce as a man gives who fights for his life, at the swollen waters on either hand of me, alive with the horrible swarming flashing of phosphorus, and watch the dim outline of the little craft soar up the black steep ahead, whilst I'd feel my own shoulders involuntarily expanding against the pressing arms of the fellows who sat on my right and left, and my legs straining like iron against the boat's floor ready to fend off the sea which one could hear arching over in our wake.

But, whether it was God's providence or our own good management, we never once shipped so much as a bucket of water, if you bar the wet of the flying foam. Onwards the boat rushed, held dead south by the magnetic card, with the strong wind straining her bit of reefed canvas, and her little

cutwater shearing through the gleaming ebony like a paper-knife through the leaves of a book.

At one o'clock the bo'sun relieved me, and there was then a sensible drop in the wind. Yet the night was coal-black. If it hadn't been for the lantern there would have been nothing to look at ; I'd stare aloft for a star, for a flaw in the sooty shroud, and bring my eye back from the ponderous blackness to the lantern for the relief the shine of it gave me. I dare say it was the haze of spray blowing low over the sea, but not too low to cover our boat, that made the night appear so dark. The presence of the deep was indicated by nothing but its fires, and the pallid tremor, the spectral gushing of foam upon it. When I surrendered the helm at one o'clock in the morning, I was so exhausted that I was forced to swallow a nip of brandy and sit down, without attempting to speak, for five or ten minutes to recover myself. Then, having benefited from the brief spell of repose, I spoke to Florence, and found both her and her aunt wide awake. I caressed and chafed my darling's hands, and spoke tenderly to the old lady.

" You are terribly wearied, Jack," said Florence ; " there is a tremble in your voice."

" The exertion of steering this boat is heavy," I replied. " I have had two hours of it. But the wind moderates, I think, and we shall be having less sea."

“Thank God for that!” quavered Aunt Damaris.

“How grandly you have brought us through so far!” cried Florence.

“Include the bo’sun, my darling,” said I.

“Oh, I knew we should be safe with you, my own!” she exclaimed, throwing one arm round my neck: and since she did this, why, I stooped and kissed her. None of the seamen may have seen my action; but Aunt Damaris did.

“You deserve to be kissed!” she cried, extending her hand to me. “Oh, Mr. Seymour, you are a noble young man!”

Well, to be sure, mates, life is precious, and the gratitude of people in peril to those whom they look to for their preservation will make their swelling hearts put some strange sayings into their mouths. I simply replied, “If we are saved, Miss Hawke, I hope you will continue to think of me as you now do.” For answer, she squeezed my hand in both hers and fell to sobbing; whereupon Florence spoke to her, whilst I, kneeling upon the thwart, peered with all my might into the gloom ahead, never knowing when the loom of land might show upon the night, seeing that Daniel’s estimate of the distance of the island was based upon dead reckoning, and that for all I could tell he might be out by some miles. This consideration made me wonder whether he was correct in setting us a due south course; and I was greatly bothered by these

doubts until, endeavouring to recall what I had heard about the island, it came into my head that one point of it was between eight hundred and nine hundred feet high, an altitude that would be visible in clear weather for many miles : so that I had reason to hope that even if the course given us was wrong by a point or more, we should nevertheless find ourselves somewhere in sight of that towering volcanic eminence at daybreak.

The sky grew lighter somewhat with the falling of the wind, the ocean showed black against the dimness behind it, and the fall of the surges had the washing sloppy sound you'll hear at sea when the billows are losing the impulse of the breeze. Still there was wind enough to keep us running fast, and the staunch little gig dived and jumped like a Deal galley in a gale in the Downs, as she danced from crest to crest and sprang out of the troubled hollows. I told the men forward to search the horizon for a sight of the other boats, and to inform me if their eyes could see anything like the loom of a hill ahead : they looked, and so did I, but there was nothing to be seen save the flicker of froth tossed up betwixt us and the sea boundary, and the folding and opening of the shadow of the night in places to the dancing of the boat.

"I'll allow, Mr. Seymour," said the bo'sun, "that we've run the long-boat hull down. This here gig is a crack little craft, sir. Blest if I'd ha' thought

she'd make such weather of it. Bill, have ye taken in any wet forrards ? ”

“ Ne'er a drop,” answered the man.

And our chances were better still now, seeing that both wind and sea were moderating. Indeed, when it came to my turn to relieve the bo'sun, the weather had so improved that I allowed one of the seamen to take a spell at the helm. It was then three o'clock, with a few stars winking dimly in the eye of the wind and the darkness lying ponderous ahead. I lifted Florence and her aunt from the cramped position in which they had been crouched for many hours, and seated them on an amidship thwart. The old lady complained bitterly of her legs, which she said were so stiff that they had scarcely any feeling in them. I told her to stamp her feet and made her drink a little weak brandy-and-water, and after a while she said she felt easier. It was a desperate time for her, poor old soul : Florence had youth on her side, and a finer spirit, but Aunt Damaris was an old woman who had pampered herself all her life ; her blood ran slowly in her veins ; she was a person easily alarmed ; and when I looked at her outline upon the thwart, recalled the feverish worries of last night, the long endurance of the day, and the desperate peril we had been in ever since it came on to blow, it almost amazed me to find her still alive, capable of sitting without support, and

talking with something even of briskness in her manner.

"Is the island in sight?" asked Florence.

"No," said I; "but if we have been heading true, it should be visible if the weather were clear."

"How far are we from it?" inquired Aunt Damaris. I looked at my note-book, calculated, and replied, "About eighteen miles."

"I hope the wind will not leave us altogether," cried Florence.

"No matter if it should," said I. "There are boys enough in this boat to make her walk."

She spoke of the other boats, and this set us talking of their occupants. Aunt Damaris wanted to know which boat Captain Jackson was in.

"The one in charge of the second mate," I replied.

"He'll lead the poor man a dreadful life," said she: "what a truly offensive person he was!"

"He showed himself so at the last," I answered.

"No, no, all through," cried the old lady: "from the very first hour of his coming on board. I always imagined that naval officers were gentlemen. But I hope to hear no more of the word *gentleman*. It has no meaning: it is a mere sound. At least I have found it so."

"Can the men have a glass of liquor apiece, sir?" sung out the bo'sun.

"Certainly: but first shake that reef out, will you, Shilling? She'll run the easier for that extra cloth."

This was at once done, and the sail mastheaded. Under the increased pressure the gig drove handsomely, and the seas astern seemed to drop the job of chasing her.

"Have the other boats as good a chance as ours of reaching the island, Jack?" asked Florence.

"Certainly they have, darling. But they'll have needed every bit as much care as we've shown. The quarter-boats are deep with fifteen people in every one of them, and they have not our legs."

"Our what?" exclaimed Aunt Damaris anxiously.

"Our speed, I should say; those in charge of them will have had plenty to do to keep the following seas from rolling into them."

"How long do you think we are likely to be on the island?" said Aunt Damaris.

"Why, that is impossible to say, Miss Hawke. Let's get there first. If the long-boat should fetch it—she's a stout craft—and if a ship be slow in coming, I for one should be quite willing to take that boat to go in quest of help, though I had to sail to Australia to find it."

"You'll never leave us with *my* consent," said Aunt Damaris. "If you go, you must take Florence and me."

The bo'sun, who was sitting by, rumbled out a

laugh which he instantly topped with an apologetic cough.

“Whatever I do will be done for Florence and you ; be sure of that,” I replied.

The old lady then said she preferred to get in the bottom of the boat again, as she did not feel the wind so bleak down there ; so I helped her off the thwart and she crouched down slowly, complaining and “ohing !” as she bent her old legs. Florence put herself behind her, and I seated myself next the bo’sun.

“Well, Shilling,” said I, “this is a queer muddle for us to find ourselves in ! What’s our lookout when we get on shore, do you calculate ?”

“Why, I don’t see nothen for it but to keep all on watching for ships,” he answered. “What part of the ocean will this island be in ?”

“Right betwixt the Indian and Southern Oceans, midway between the Cape of Good Hope and Australia, and many thousand miles from civilized land. *That’s* the devil of it, Shilling. If it were Madagascar, or even the Marquesas ! but an infernal volcanic lump ’midst thousands of leagues of water, offering nothing for vessels to call for ! Well, well, we must trust to Providence. Would to God those ladies were safe !”

“One of them, anyways,” said he, significantly. “Beg pardon for plain speakin’, Mr. Seymour, but she’s a beautiful lady.”

"She's my sweetheart, Jim."

"Ay, ye don't want a telescope to see *that*. And you're here for the love of her, I allow?"

"For that only. What short of *her*, Shilling, could have brought me to sea again?"

"Well, nothen short of it, I should say. I reckon ye're lying up well for the old lady's affection. She seems to take to you as if you were her youngest son and a clargyman."

I drew forth my pipe, lighted it and smoked. Very slowly now indeed did the time go by; I'd look at my watch and wonder to find only half an hour had passed since I last pulled it out. I repeatedly called to the men forward to keep a bright lookout for anything like a deeper shadow in the blackness ahead, but though the stars hung weak astern, with a faint clearness of the sky over the horizon there, the night stood black as thunder over the bows, and it was like staring into a void to direct one's eyes that way. The sea was running quietly, with little foam and a curious subsidence of its phosphorescent flashing, and the wind had fallen to a weight barely enough to keep us sailing at the rate of four knots. At last, looking away into the east, I spied the faint grey of the dawn rising mistily out of the dark waters. Dimly and slowly it grew, giving a leaden sickly tinge to sea and sky there, and a cold steel colour to the clearer heavens in the north. I cried

“Daybreak at last, thank God !” and Florence and her aunt at once rose from the bottom of the boat and seated themselves on the thwart. I stood up, looking intently ahead past the sail. Every eye was turned in that direction, and not a syllable was uttered as the cold light went sifting through the darkness, spreading out north and south, and giving a most indescribably melancholy, sullen appearance to the headlong waters, until on a sudden, and as if in obedience to a command, a wild cheer broke from every man’s throat aboard the gig as the rugged outline of the island, not more than eight miles distant, and lying in a line with the stem of the boat, came shouldering its towering proportions out of the gloom. “Oh !” shrieked Florence, clasping her hands, “there it is at last, aunt !” and for five minutes full, no other words escaped us, while the wonderful lonely rock, growing clearer and clearer, stood out pale and hard against the light grey of the Southern sky with the water trembling between us and it, and the heavens behind us growing blue as the rising sun, hidden to us, heralded its approach by making flaming gold of the two lofty peaks of the hollow towering island.

CHAPTER VIII.

ST. PAUL'S ISLAND.

THE sun rose in a belt of vapour that he glorified into a streak of dazzling silver to the extreme ends of the long stretch of it; and ere soaring clear he flashed up five or six spokes or beams of white light, of the length of the horizon, to the zenith. The spectacle was incomparably beautiful: there was a pink tinge in the north and west and south, and the sky that had looked as black as soot before daybreak, now showed itself to have been made so by surfaces of cloud resembling the scales of armour, or ribs on brown sand, in the way they were compacted, with a clear space in the north where we had seen the stars; and sharp under this scaly sky shone those beautiful silver beams, as if the sun were the nave of a wheel as big as the world, of which one half of the tire was hidden beneath the sea. I somehow found time to notice this glorious appearance before the sun sailed up clear, though I could have sworn that my eyes were at that period riveted on the island, that lay

in white and brown, and sharp upon the sea over the stem. I gazed intently, calling to the others to tell me if they could see any sign of a ship near the land; but they all said no, there was nothing to be seen on this side, whatever might be lying round the corner. "But something may heave in view as we go along," says the bo'sun, cheerfully.

The breeze that blew kept the waters trembling, and eastwards it was impossible to look, on account of the blinding light on the sea there; but there were no more billows, nothing but the northerly swell, wrinkled with the wind. I stood up, and took a long stare round.

"We're alone," said I; "wherever the other boats may be, they're not within *this* circle."

"Perhaps some of them may have already reached the island," exclaimed Florence.

"No fear, miss," cried the bo'sun. "Lord love ye! this here's a boat that would take the whole of the others in tow and not feel that she was a-draggin' of 'em."

"She has certainly carried us splendidly," said Aunt Damaris.

"Thanks to the magnificent manner in which she has been handled, aunt," exclaimed Florence.

"Ay, ye may say that, miss," put in one of the men; "both Mr. Seymour and the bo'sun have done well."

"Well indeed," grunted another; "there never

was better management; and it's something, maty, for the sun to rise and show us what we've been headin' for all through the night slick over the bows."

"When I first saw this boat," said Aunt Damaris, "and noticed that she was the smallest of them all, I should have refused to enter her had you not had charge, Mr. Seymour. Now she has proved to be the fastest, safest, and best of them, showing my niece and me once more that we could not have done better than put ourselves under your care."

"True for you, lady," said the bo'sun. "You'd have made a big mistake if you hadn't come along with Mr. Seymour. I told you what he was, yesterday; and last night's job and that there island yonder proves my words correct, I *think*."

"Let's have some breakfast," said I, quite willing that Aunt Damaris should praise me, but not much pleased that Shilling should be giving me all the credit, seeing what his own part had been. We seated ourselves in such a manner as to trim the boat properly, and made out a meal with preserved meat, biscuit, brandy-and-water for the sailors and me, and wine for the ladies. The wind blew softly, and we stole along. Aunt Damaris had a fearfully crumpled look: her curls were awry, her dress creased like a table-cloth; her yellowness had gathered a new shade; her

greenish eyes, which had a deep-sunk appearance owing to the darkness in the hollows of them, were red and inflamed, as if she had been crying bitterly throughout the night. Florence had a heavy, worn look, was very pale, and I'd notice her hand tremble when she raised it to her mouth; otherwise suffering had wrought no marked change in her: and so lovely she always was, let her appear as she would, that such things as her hair's dishevelment and the disorder of her apparel you'd have observed only as a kind of grace in her. What sort of a figure *I* cut I don't much care to think. It was three mornings since I had shaved, and my chin felt like a pig's back in the palm of my hand. Fortunately I was fair, so that this growth perhaps made no particular horror of me; but then it was three mornings since I had washed myself, since I had put on clean linen, since a brush had touched my hair: and if you'd like to know how I relished my appearance (which my imagination deplorably exaggerated, no doubt), think of yourself in the state I then was, sitting in the blaze of the searching morning sun, with your sweetheart close alongside looking at you. As to the seamen, you would not have known that they were not fresh from their fore-castle, so very much as usual was their aspect. They seemed a trifle wearied perhaps, for this was the second night they had gone through without sleep—as we

had,—and many hours of the first of those nights they had passed at the *Strathmore's* pumps; but they eat their food heartily, obtained permission to smoke with real satisfaction, and seemed but very little the worse for what they had undergone.

All this while we were incessantly directing our eyes at the island, the conformation of which was now apparent. The slope of it was plain, rounding up from where a huge rock stood detached from it, till the highest portion had reached to over eight hundred feet above the sea, and then sliding down into a sort of long tail, so that, as you may see from the subjoined sketch, the appearance of it to us, at a distance of between six and seven miles, was that of a monstrous dead floating whale. The



sunshine made it whitish in places, and it resembled a shape of marble partly shadowed, lying there in the light blue of the water, with the scaly clouds slanting and gleaming down with prismatic tints upon them behind it.

“What a tiny island, Jack!” cried Florence, gazing at it with a kind of consternation. “How shall we be able to exist upon it?” And she gave a start, and her hands fell to her side, as with a sweep

of her languid sorrowful eyes she seemed to take into her soul the wonder and loneliness of the mighty leagues of ocean that surrounded that little rock.

"Keep up your heart, my darling," I whispered. "It is a refuge for the moment, at least; depend upon it we shall not be exiled long." Then, observing the bo'sun peering at the island under his hand, I cried, "D'ye see anything?"

"Well, I fancied I see something like smoke just now, and I'm trying to make sure," he answered, still staring.

"We mustn't hope for too much," said I, after taking a long look. "It's a volcanic island, Shilling, and what you saw may be vapour breaking from the cliff."

"Whatever it was, it's gone," said he; "I don't see it now."

Aunt Damaris kept silence, with her hands clasped upon her lap and her eyes fixed on the land. I don't fancy the old lady actually realized what it signified; I mean she took it delightedly as a substitute for the open boat, without thinking of its nakedness, its frightful isolation, the chances of a grim and dreadful inhospitality that might force us for refuge to the boat again. Gradually as we approached, more and more of its features grew visible—the huge block of rock standing up out of the water on the eastern side; the vast height of cliff on either hand rounding and

sweeping backwards into a great basin, whereof the frame appeared to be groups of rugged naked mountains ; and the sea gleaming in a prodigious pool past a natural breakwater that came down shelving from the northern and southern eminences till they vanished under water in a narrow opening. The whole rock, indeed, was nothing more nor less than the mouth of a crater that one could hardly reckon to be extinct, for in several places from the topmost cliffs small bodies of vapour were to be seen sluggishly passing away to the south, resembling thin volumes of steam rising from caldrons of hot water. Instinctively one's thoughts went to the base of the mighty mountain whose lonely summit forked up eight or nine hundred feet above the level of the water. Somehow the fancy of that black, hidden, ocean-washed tower of land, whose bottom rested upon the blind bed of the sea, God alone knows how many hundreds of fathoms deep, made the point it hove up into the sunshine horribly desolate, unnatural and wild in my sight. It was like the revelation of something that nature intended the ocean should keep hidden, and for *that* reason this bit of it that showed was awful to the imagination. Nothing living was to be seen upon it ; not a trace of habitation. It seemed like coming to a place that was not a part of the world we live in ; one looked at it with the feelings the mind gets when

one peers at the moon through a powerful telescope and sees mountains and seas hanging in the deep indigo-blue. Along the ironlike base of it the azure deep rolled its swell in foam, and the washing thunder of the surf came back in a sound that might have passed for the deep strong moaning of some giant imprisoned in that huge deep shell of rock.

"If people ever land there at all," says the bo'sun, eyeing the island as if it were a strange animal, "it'll be through the hole in that there breakwater, Mr. Seymour."

"Yes," said I, who was now steering the boat, and heading her for the aperture indicated as I spoke; "and a lucky job it is, Shilling, that the wind allowed us to make that land in daylight; for what could we have done with it in the blackness?"

The long swell shortened and flattened as the water shoaled; and though the sun was over the gig's stern, yet I seemed to feel the shadow of the huge cliffs upon the white clear air, as we drove softly into the north entrance with the curious rocky breakwater jutting out of the blue on either hand, and running up the cliffs into the sky. In another minute we were floating on the small calm internal sea or crater-lake that washed in silver round the base of the perfect cup, our sail lowered, and our gaze in search of a landing-place. Florence stood erect, with her hands clasped and

her eyes gleaming under a little frown of wonderment as she looked around her. The strange, mysterious silence, not a sound of the surf reaching us; the tall circular heights of cliff shadowing the sky, so that one seemed to look up as through a huge shaft; the startling paleness of the heavens that closed glimmering like a lid upon the rocky tops; the metallic shine like quicksilver in the water on which we floated; the sudden weird environment after the leagues of open ocean,—combined to produce such an effect upon us all that for several moments after we had lowered away the sail we remained silent, staring about us, and breathing quickly. Then said the bo'sun, speaking in a low voice, "Isn't that a hut there, Mr. Seymour?"

I looked, and spied a rude structure, apparently formed of rubble and roughly roofed with pitched planks, standing on a broad ledge of rock up in the north-eastern corner of the crater.

"Yes," I replied, speaking low too, "that's a hut. It's near to the best landing-place I can see. That'll be the spot to get ashore."

"Talk o' Robinson Crusoe!" I heard one of the men mutter to another: "damme if this *here* ain't a start that beats my time."

"What's that moving up there?" cried Aunt Damaris, excitedly.

"It's a goat!" exclaimed Florence.

Sure enough it was: and beyond it were two or three more. They looked down at us quietly, from a grassy ledge or slope of rock about a hundred feet high.

"Goats, eh!" said the bo'sun, peering at them. "Well, I'm jiggered! There oughtn't to be a man fur off, Mr. Seymour."

"If there's one anywhere about, he certainly can't be far off," I answered.

The boat was brought alongside the low long ledge that came shelving down past the hut in the form of an esplanade; the man jumped out, and I assisted my darling and Aunt Damaris to step ashore.

There is always something thrilling in the first feel of solid dry land under the feet, after weeks of the heaving and floating motion of shipboard; and I dare say this sense was strong in us all for the moment, though Heaven knows it passed quickly enough in me into a positive emotion of horror when I glanced at the gloomy frowning cliffs. To be sure it was a reprieve from those dire perils of the deep we had come through, but it was only the reprieve that a desolate frightful dungeon would give to a man who, entering it, knows not if ever he shall get away from it. However, it would not do to give way to such fancies as these; I plucked up, and in as hearty a manner as I could summon, told the men to make the

boat's painter fast, and to hand the provisions and water out of her. Then, noticing that Aunt Damaris and Florence could hardly stand, owing to their cramped limbs, I led them to where a piece of rock jutting out formed a natural seat, and leaned by their side against the cliff behind, watching the men, feeling my own legs too crippled to attempt any explorations until they should have got something of their old use into them again.

The sunshine slanted through the broken ruin of the crater in a perfect gush of misty silver light, and flashed up half the whitish water of the lake, till one seemed to be able to see to the very bottom of it. I now observed that the island, instead of being the naked lump of rock it had looked to be when viewed from a distance, was covered with coarse green grass; but there was no bush nor tree of any kind to be seen upon it. I ran my eyes carefully over the crater walls, but could perceive no other structure but the one that stood above us. What scene the island might submit from the towering heights, I could not conceive; but I did not doubt that if there were people upon it, they would be on this side, near the entrance, where the cliffs seemed most accessible; so that, seeing nobody and only the one dismal forlorn old hut built a little way up the steep, I felt persuaded, then and there, that we were absolutely alone.

I found Florence watching me anxiously. I smiled when our eyes met, and said, "I see but one hut; but one is enough—it will shelter us for the short time I expect we shall remain here."

"Oh, Jack," she cried, "how do you know it will be a short time? you can only *hope* it!" And she glanced sadly across the lake at the cliffs there, which stood up against the sky like prison walls.

"It's a fearfully desolate spot!" exclaimed Aunt Damaris, with a shudder, as if she were only now beginning to understand all the significance of this ocean rock. "Was there no other land that we could have reached?"

"There'll be another island away out yonder, to the east of north, but uninhabited like this," I replied. "Exclude that, Miss Hawke, and there is no land nearer than South Africa and Australia. Florence darling, you say I can only *hope* that our stay will be short. Well, there is nothing sure, and, whether one is on a desert island or in a crowded city, one has still got to go on hoping. But why I believe we shall not be here long is because this is summer time in the Southern Ocean, and vessels in summer time, bound to the eastward, often pass close to St. Paul's. What we must do is to set up the boat's mast as a signal-post on that hill-top there, and if your aunt will lend us the black silk shawl, or handkerchief, she wears pinned over her shoulders under her cloak, we'll hoist it as a signal."

"Oh certainly, you can have it," answered the old lady; and with trembling hands she opened her cloak, removed the shawl, and gave it to me.

By this time the men had got our little stock of provisions and water ashore, and were looking round them to see what was next to be done. I was already beginning to feel the benefit of stretching my legs by standing on them, and, calling to the bo'sun, I asked him and the others to join us, that we might hold a council and consider what measures we were to take for keeping ourselves alive on the island till help came. The six seamen approached, and stood in a group fronting us.

"First of all, my lads," said I, "how do you feel, now that we've done with the sea for a short spell?"

The bo'sun and two others announced that they felt first-class, all alive O, and quite hearty; another said that he was pretty middling; and the fifth and sixth, that they'd be all right when they had had some sleep.

"And you, ladies?" asked the bo'sun.

Florence answered that she and her aunt felt cramped by their long confinement in the boat; otherwise they were well.

"Now," said I, "our first business will be to get that boat's mast set up on the hill yonder,"—pointing to the eminence that I have since found marked as eight hundred and forty-five feet high. "Miss Hawke, here, has been good enough to

furnish us with this shawl, which being black will make a fine signal. It'll be a deuce of a climb," I continued, looking up; "but it ought to be done, and done soon."

"Jim," said the bo'sun, turning to the man so called, "let that be yours and my job; I allow that you and me's about the freshest."

"Right you are," responded the man.

I handed the shawl (I give it this name, but in reality it was a very large square silk handkerchief, about three and a half feet broad each way) —I say, I handed the shawl to the bo'sun, who folded it upon his knee, and then shoved it under his waistcoat.

"Another thing that ought to be done at once," said I, "is for two of you to start off, and see if there's any fresh water to be found. I am afraid you'll discover nothing but hot springs; these, if you come across them, you can taste, so as to let us know if the water will be fit to drink when cold; but what I hope you'll find is rain water. I've got a notion that, in the winter time, whalers call here to fill their casks. There was rain enough on the night of the collision, and there's a chance of your meeting with enough to keep those breakers replenished. Who volunteers for that job?"

Two of them promptly answered.

"The others," said I, "will keep with me, to overhaul that hut there, and see what can be done

to make a habitable shanty of it." I looked at my watch. "We might as well have something to eat and drink before we start on our various errands."

Some biscuit and a tin of meat were fetched, along with the brandy and a bottle of wine. We threw ourselves down without taking much heed of what we sat on—it was hard enough, whatever it was,—and fell to our slender meal. Mates, *that's* a picture which comes up often enough in me, waking and sleeping. The sky had cleared, it was now a fair blue, and sheer up on our right went the horn of cliff right into it, with a clean sweep round into the west and south, and then drawing down again into the north, where the edge of the crater was gone like a triangular piece out of a china cup, making the heavens glimmer dim over the smooth white lake, which the natural break-water held inviolate from the blue swell that rolled in snow against the desolate iron base outside. The sun was due north, and the light of it shone in a blue airy radiance past the cliff behind us down upon the southern horn, which it brightened to its summit; but the heights under which we sat were in shadow, and no glimmer of sunshine touched the lake, and the azure gloom—for such it was—gave a swart and sullen accentuation to the rows of towering ridges which ran away round. God! it wanted but darkness, and a wet gleam of red moonlight striking through into the water that

filled a mouth which had once been incandescent, and through which, with that water gone, a man might in other days have peered down into the central hell of this earth, to set a timid creature seeing ghosts; and what fitter play-ground for drowned seamen's wraiths? Heart alive! it was a relief to the strained fancy, worked up into moments of agony by conjecture of what our fate might prove, to turn one's gaze from that frightful solemn hollow, up through which one *knew* the time had been when the convulsed earth in her fiery throes had spewed great crimson flames and vast coils of sooty smoke, to the bronzed and hairy features of the sailors; to the homeliness of poor Aunt Damaris, sitting there in her warm gown and cloak, slowly masticating her bit of bread and meat, with forlorn eyes dismally revolving round the naked rocks; to the languid beauty of my darling, who never met my gaze without a softening of her lovely eyes that set my heart bitterly yearning for any, oh for the least assurance of *her* ultimate preservation.

"If the long-boat means to fetch this island, Mr. Seymour," said the bo'sun, "she should be heaving in sight by this time."

"You may sight her as you climb," I replied. "I'd sooner all the other boats missed this rock than that she should. She's a craft to make use of if help should prove too long in coming."

"What help have we to reckon on, sir?" asked one of the men.

"A passing ship."

He looked down, making no answer.

"I see nothen' to make a flare of—nothen' that'll make a smoke," said another of the men, glancing at the cliffs over his shoulder.

"Well, let's have a hunt before we settle those things," said I. "There may be a store of old planks knocking about somewhere."

"We shan't want for fresh meat, if there's e'er a one of us nimble enough to catch them there goats," observed the bo'sun.

"Ay, ye have to catch 'em first," said a seaman.

"I have a pistol," said I. "By lying hid, some execution may be done with it."

"How are we to cook the meat when we get it?" inquired Florence.

"Why, miss, there ought to be fire in this here island, if it's fire as makes smoke," said the bo'sun, pointing to the vapour that was here and there oozing from the cliffs. "And if there's fire, there ought to be nothen' to stop us from cooking a bloomin' old goat."

"Perhaps we may find a hot-water spring fit to boil fish in—and flesh, too," said I. "There ought to be no lack of fish here."

"They'll be like the goats, sir," answered one of the men, grinning: "they'll want catching."

“We’ll catch ’em, if we have to dive for ’em,” exclaimed the bo’sun. “Why, William, one ’ud think your liver was gone wrong, mate.” Then, pulling off his waistcoat and carefully folding it, he proceeded to roll up his shirt-sleeves, meanwhile eyeing the cliff he was to climb, with his lips moving as if he were calculating. The man who was to assist him also turned to to adjust himself for the very arduous job.

We lingered a bit longer while the others finished their dinner, talking over our chances of escape, what was to be done to attract the attention of distant ships, and so forth; and then the men set about their duties. I advised Florence and her aunt to keep where they were, for though the hut was not far off, there was a knee-splitting climb to be done in order to fetch it; but the old lady said she was too nervous to be left alone.

“How are we to know,” she exclaimed, with an alarmed look around, “that this island is not inhabited by savages or wild beasts?”

“There’s no room for such objects, Miss Hawke,” I replied. “Why, I don’t suppose the whole place is very much more than two miles long, and out of that you’ve got to take the lump of circular water there. But if you’re at all nervous by all means accompany us, if you think you can climb to that hut.”

She instantly got up, and I told the two seamen

to support her by laying hold, each of them, of an arm ; and then passed mine under Florence's, that she might use me as a crutch, and we slowly tramped up towards the hut, leaving the bo'sun and his mate busy unstepping the mast in the gig, whilst the others were scrambling over the rocks in search of water and of whatever else was to be met with.

"Jack," said Florence, "do you think we shall be saved?"

"Yes," said I.

"But *how*, Jack?"

"By a ship sighting our signal ; or by some of us going away in the long-boat, when she arrives ; or by sending the gig to cruise twenty or thirty miles off away out yonder, to intercept or chase any passing vessel. Most of us are sailors, my darling, and we shall find a way to be saved."

"You and the bo'sun managed the little boat wonderfully well last night, Jack. What darlings sailors are when one is in danger ! But is not this a dreadful adventure ! How sorry you must feel that you followed me to sea."

"You daren't look me full in the face and say *that*," said I, tightening my grip of her.

She peeped at me with a half-smile ; and then, with a shudder and a deep sigh, she exclaimed, "Oh, Jack, I wish we were safe at home in Clifton !"

"A little patience, my pet," said I ; "depend upon it, we'll find our way there."

“Does not my aunt keep up wonderfully? Would not you have thought that such a trial as this would have broken her down—almost *killed* her?” said she, sinking the music of her voice into a tremulous note of awe.

I looked at the poor old lady staggering and slipping betwixt the two rough figures of the seamen, and agreed that she had certainly passed through quite enough since the night of the collision to have killed her off, had she not been a very wiry person. And here, maybe, having Florence alone, and her sweet arm snugged against my side, I might have indulged in several flights of sentiment respecting Aunt Damaris as an ally, and the strong hope of ultimately winning Mr. Hawke's favour which her regard and liking for me had kindled; but conversation was speedily rendered impossible by loss of breath. The old lady constantly forced the seamen to halt; and as often as she paused we did. The inner sides of the crater here ran away, to a height of eight hundred feet or so, in a sharp slope crowded with bulging rocks, long broad ledges, inclined platforms and the like, and the labour of climbing—I do not speak of the sailors, who were fresh from the ratlines and foot-ropes of the ship—was quadrupled in our case by the deep feeling of fatigue that want of sleep induces, and by the crippling of our limbs through our cramped confinement in the narrow gig. I felt

heartly ashamed of my own lack of physical energy, which I could only attribute to the indolent life I had led for three years ashore ; but, nevertheless, was always thankful enough when Aunt Damaris's pausings gave me an excuse to stop too, and fetch my breath. Indeed, I believe that short climb distressed me more than Florence ; which I can only attribute to the intense mental anxiety I had passed through and was still enduring, and to its effects upon my nerves and strength.

Reaching the hut at last, we found ourselves inspecting one of the rudest shanties mortal being could imagine. It was about twelve feet long by ten feet broad ; composed of windowless walls, formed of rubble or bits of rough rock and stone and rubbish cemented by a kind of mud, the appearance of which made one suppose it to have been taken from a bed of volcanic clay. It was roofed by a number of rude planks blackened with pitch, though rusty with wet and exposure. The entrance faced the slope. There was no door, and when I peered in, not knowing what sight I was to behold in it, I had to shut my eyes, and rub them, and wait a little before I could see. The structure was perfectly empty. Here and there, in patches, the coarse grass of the island flourished upon the floor. I struck a wax-match and looked into the corners, but found nothing. No hint was furnished us of the use this hut had been erected to serve ;

whether it was built by sealers or by castaways for shelter, or by a hunting party as a temporary refuge whilst they caught fish for salting, it was idle to conjecture. The gloom and nakedness of it fell with a chill upon the heart. I could not conceive of any detail invented by human hands that should more desperately heighten the horrible loneliness of that desert ocean-rock than this grim, dark, naked hut, suggesting nothing, and by its muteness forcing the mind into the dreariest fancies.

I looked at Aunt Damaris and Florence, who stood outside in the light, peering in at the dusk in which my figure would be scarcely visible to them.

"A nice hotel for them poor ladies to come to!" said one of the fellows at my side, under his breath.

"Ay, we must count it as among the pleasures of shipwreck," I replied. "But let's say nothing to dishearten them or ourselves, mate." And quitting the hut, I said to Aunt Damaris, "It's but a rough place, Miss Hawke, but it's a shelter any way; it'll be a roof to lie under; and I, for one, am thankful to find it ready for us here."

"Is there any bed-place in it—anything to lie upon?" cried the poor old body, striving to pierce the dim interior.

"We'll soon rig up something that'll answer the purpose of a bed-place," I replied.

"Oh, Jack!" exclaimed Florence, catching hold

of my arm, "it'll be impossible for us to sleep in that dreadful hole!"

"It'll be full of rats!" groaned out Aunt Damaris. "Oh dear! oh dear! what a situation to find one's self in!" and the tears streamed down her face.

This wouldn't do at any price; so putting a great show of bustle and heartiness in my manner, I sung out, "Why, it's a first-class shelter! What should we have done without it? With the boat's sail for a mattress, Miss Hawke, you'll lie as snug as ever you did aboard the *Strathmore*. As to light, we have the boat's lantern; and besides, there'll be no need to see when the night comes—we shall want to sleep. Why, the sight of that hut should make one thank God! Men, think of the ladies having no bed but these rocks, no cover but that sky up there. Florence!" I cried, caressing the hand that clutched my arm, "where's the fine spirit that supported you through yesterday and last night? If ever we're to see Clifton again, my darling, we must cheer our spirits up so as to remain alive; for it's grief and misery that kill—not an old hut like that, which will keep the wet off if any wet falls; nor an island like this, which, bad as it is, is a mighty deal better than a small open boat in half a gale of wind. Eh, my lads? what say *you*?"

"Why," answered one of them, "I say that what

ye're observing, sir, is full of good sense. No use crying, ladies. The job's a bad 'un ; but, bad as it is, it might ha' been so much worse, that ye can't look fair into it without beholdin' a kind of hordering that should put a stop to any kind o' growlin'."

"Ay, ladies, it's a bad job, as this man here says," observed the other seaman, who probably supposed that I expected he should also make a speech: "but it isn't so thick as to shut out all daylight; and ye know, mum, sailors don't take much notice of a squall that they can see through."

"Those are the right sentiments," said I. "And now, lads, suppose we turn to and get this house shipshape? We'll bring the sail up from the boat, and store the provisions here; and whilst you go about that job, I'll make my way up yonder and have a look at the ocean; for, as the bo'sun said, if the other boats mean to join us, it's about time they were heaving in sight."

Finding I meant to leave them for a few minutes, Florence and her aunt said they would go with the sailors to the place where they had sat near the boat; it was cheerfuller there than near that dreadful hut: so whilst they made their way down the slope, I slowly and laboriously climbed to a height of about a hundred feet above the hut, which brought me to the edge of the horn looking westwards, whence I could see the huge lonely rock that stood hard by, shaped like a ninepin and

called, as I have since heard, by that name, with the open sea gleaming past the channel betwixt it and the coast of the island, and the leagues of water around stretching from about north by east to due south. After even the short environment of those lonesome towering crater-walls, it was with a sort of momentary joy that one looked into the mighty open distance. I was about the height of the *Strathmore's* main royal yard above the water, and consequently commanded a vast surface of ocean ; but though my sight was extremely good and the atmosphere was of glass-like purity, I could not perceive the least sign of the boats. Not the faintest speck of white broke the sweep of the blue girdle. There was a faint bluish shadow trembling upon the sea-line past the ninepin-shaped rock, a little to the east of north : and for some moments I looked at it, wondering what it could be, but never for an instant mistaking it for a ship ; till it came into my head that Amsterdam Island would bear that way, about forty or fifty miles from St. Paul's, and that that dim blotch there must be it. I was amazed to see no signs of the boats. We had come through a rough night, it is true ; but since the gig had weathered it, the others should have been able to do so : and even supposing the sea had run too high for the management of one or two of them, it was not to be imagined that *all* had suffered. Where were they, then ? Why did

not the long-boat heave in sight ? Had they, more fortunate than us, been picked up by a ship ? If so, and in such weather as this, she was sure to seek us in this island. Yet there was no appearance of a ship. Had they mistaken Amsterdam Island for St. Paul's ? Had they run past this island in the dark ? *That* seemed impossible ; for the gig was the fastest boat, the others were a long way astern when the night came down, and yet, fast as we had sailed, we were a good eight miles distant from St. Paul's when the day broke ; so that they could not have outrun this bit of land. I scanned the great blue surface narrowly, through sixteen points of it, which was as much as I could embrace, but it was a huge blank in every direction except where the distant island dimly smudged the gleaming blue of the sky. Bitterly disappointed and deeply worried I felt : for I had reckoned upon the long-boat as a means of making our desperate condition known ; for, as I have said, she was a fine large powerfully built boat, and I, for one, should not have hesitated in trying for the Cape, or Australia, or any other distant land in her, to summon help there, if I did not meet with it on the road.

It was a gloriously fine day : the sky of that soft and noble blue one only sees in these latitudes, with a few puffs of pearl-like cloud slowly moving under it ; the same light northerly draught that had wafted us that morning to the island was

abroad; and you saw the water twinkling up the great blinding shining silver shaft that lay upon the sea under the sun, till it dissolved in liquid sparkles full of prismatic tints upon the deep blue of the heavens behind the ocean-line. The swell ran gently, yet the thunder of it came up to me from the base of the cliff I sat on; and from *that* noise, heard amidst a scene of the tenderest azure splendour, you guessed what the roaring would be when the tempest raged over the mighty world of ocean that sloped, as I looked into the north, to the broiling Indian coasts without a break of land between, if you save the Chagos Archipelago. Oh, it was a sense of infinity that made an overwhelming thought to me, who sat as a castaway looking into the brilliant remoteness, and it was a kind of mechanical instinct—as a man raises his arm to save his face from a blow—that drew my eyes away from the terror of that enormous expanse of blue sea to seek the bo'sun on the heights above, for the relief I should find in turning my back upon a spectacle too vast for the mind to conceive without a strain that might ruin it.

Well, he and his mate were not atop of the great cliff yet; but they had made wonderful progress, considering the character of the steep, and their having to bear a middling heavy spar along with them. I left my perch, and got down to where

Florence and her aunt was sitting, and found that the men had carried the boat's sail to the hut, together with some of the provisions, and were now walking off with a small cask of water betwixt them, handling it as if it were glass, for we could not yet be sure that there was more to be had when that was gone.

"Are the other boats in sight, Mr. Seymour?" asked Aunt Damaris, the moment I was near enough for her to call to me.

"No," I replied, "there are no signs of them."

"No signs of them!" cried Florence, in a tone of alarm. "What has become of them, then?"

"No signs of them!" echoed her aunt. "Gracious mercy! what can have happened?"

"It's impossible to guess," I replied. "I don't know what to think. They may have mistaken the other island for this. They may have been rescued. They may all have foundered. God alone knows why they don't heave in sight." Then, seeing that I was showing too much of the disconsolate mood I had tumbled into up on that cliff there, I said, "But please understand, Miss Hawke, that, so far as we are concerned, their not reaching the island means nothing. If I am troubled, it is for their sakes. I want to believe them safe; but if they arrived they could not help us—they could not do more than we are doing,"

said I, looking up at the bo'sun and his companion, who were mere pigmies in the slope above. "Indeed, their numbers might prove fatal to us all. Think of a hundred souls on this island! How could they be fed——"

"Oh but, Jack, you said that the long-boat might be the means of saving us," interrupted Florence.

"It may come yet," I replied evasively; for what could I say? how could I encourage them beyond trying to keep their hopes up? The facts were all before them—the boundless ocean, our tiny rock,—they knew our chances as well as I. I could not do more than speak cheerfully, and animate them by talking of our prospect of being released by a passing ship; but oh, my lads, it went into my heart like a knife to see the wild, troubled, hopeless look my darling gave me when, with her sweetheart's eyes, she had penetrated my thoughts; to hear her sudden convulsive sob; to mark the quick passionate clasp of her hands together, and the bitter despondent droop of her sweet face upon her bosom. I could not bear it. I sprang to her side and held her to me. God knows what I said; but if they comforted her, my eager feverish assurances had a contrary effect upon her aunt. She burst into a miserable fit of weeping, wrung her hands, broke out into the strangest talk about herself; saying that she would have gladly died to-

morrow in her bed at home could she have found her way there instead of perishing fearfully by degrees upon a desert island, and forced to leave her old bones to lie upon those rocks without a chance of Christian sepulture. This outburst did my darling good, by fixing her attention upon something else than our position. Grasping the old lady, each of us, by her hands, we turned to with all our might and main to hearten the poor soul up. And whilst we were hard at this job, I suddenly spied her shawl floating fair in the sky over the hill-top, from the mast which the bo'sun had at that moment planted.

"Look, Miss Hawke!" cried I, in such a tone of elation that I was almost deceived myself by it, "there floats as noble a signal as was ever made by shipwrecked people. See how the two seamen value it! Do you observe them waving their caps?"—which we could very plainly perceive, though, if they cheered, not the faintest sound of their voices reached us. "Every ship that passes this island has a telescope levelled at it. That flag—that signal there—will be as clear in the lens nine miles distant as it is to us here, and the first captain who sees it will instantly shift his helm to bear down and ascertain what it means."

The poor old woman, drying her eyes, strained them at her shawl; but Florence, barely glancing at it, resumed her seat on the bit of cliff, and sat

with clasped hands and downward-fixed gaze ; and recalling her appearance, I believe that at that moment she had sunk to the lowest degree of hopelessness it is possible for the living heart to arrive at.

CHAPTER IX.

A HOPELESS POSITION.

THE bo'sun and his mate came down from the crater-top leisurely, as if they conversed earnestly on the road. Sometimes they'd pause to look at the shawl, that made, alack ! but a small-enough signal ; and then you'd see them peering out seawards under their hands ; and now and again they'd crouch down, as if they had come across a vegetable and were tasting it ; and I saw them go to where some wreaths of vapour oozed up into the air, and take a long look at what was there. They met with the two explorers when they were half-way down the slope, and then, putting their faces resolutely towards us, the four of them came dropping and scrambling and shoving along.

It was hard upon two o'clock ; the shadow of the northern walls lay upon the surface of the crater-lake and midway the height of the southern cliffs, past which the sunshine hung in splendour ; while the rugged summit, built up of defiles,

trembled in the flowing blue air. Nothing stirred save the figures of the approaching men: the goats had vanished, the lake stood like a huge burning glass in the immense cup that contained it. All that you could hear was the murmur of the surf outside, that reached us with a dim distant sound. The silence of the lonely mighty ocean seemed to be enclosed within these grim primeval walls. I ran my eye to the tops of them, and wondered to what height they had originally reached. How close to the sky were they when in centuries past they hurled up fire and smoke, and cast upon the ocean-night a glare whose fierce crimson illuminated leagues of this dark unnavigated sea? Slowly the tempests were doing their work. Bit by bit they would crumble away the visible summit of the enormous mountain whose base was on the bed of the sea, till fresh convulsions in the heart of the earth should, with horrible belchings, reconstitute the wondrous monument, and heave far into the skies the giant rocky figure, of which this crater in which I sat was but a feeble, mutilated, and decaying symbol.

Well, it was but a fancy, mates; for when those walls were gone, I dare say mortal eyes might never see others in their place again; but when you get into such a place as *that*, which is like the cradle of Time, where the old chap was born, and where maybe he retired when the sun stood still, and on

other occasions when his arrangements have been interfered with, and when you fall to thinking of the fire and smoke that cup was once full of, why, outlandish fancies will seize you, more especially when it happens that you're cast away upon it, and never know down which of the hollow slopes you'll spy the skeleton Death stalking, when hunger and thirst, loneliness and exposure have done their work with you.

The four men arrived, pale with heat and weariness; they cast themselves upon the grass at the base of the lump of rock under which the ladies and I were sitting, and the fellows who had stayed with us came up from the edge of the crater-lake where the gig lay, and sat down amongst their mates.

"Desperate hard climb, that, sir," said the bo'sun, looking up to the point where the boat's mast stood. "A man needs to be all a goat to manage the likes of them mountains."

"There's land in sight out away to the nor-rards," said the sailor who had accompanied him.

"Yes," I replied, "Amsterdam Island: about as hospitable a rock as this. Did you see anything that resembled a boat, bo'sun?"

"There's ne'er a sign of 'em," he said. "Up there ye can see all round, and, barring the bit of land in the north, there's nothen' going but sky

and water. It's queer, Mr. Seymour ; what could have become of them ? ”

“ We cannot imagine, Mr. Shilling,” exclaimed Aunt Damaris, whose eyes, from weeping, looked like ring-worms. “ What do *you* think ? ”

The bo'sun stared hard at her, and answered, “ There's no good speculatin', mum, when ye're dealing with the ocean. There's no good in wonderin', for it don't satisfy the mind ; and if thinkin' can't do that, then what I say is, there's no use in indulging of it.”

“ My notion is, they've mistook the island and gone ashore on that lump to the norrards,” said one of the men.

“ Likely enough,” I exclaimed. “ Did you meet with any fresh water ? ”

“ Yes,” said the man : “ both hot and cold. There's a artificial well up yonder,” says he, pointing, “ properly dug with spades, with near upon half a ton o' soft water in it—shouldn't you think that's the quantity, Joe ? ”

“ Ay, that's about it,” replied the other of the two explorers.

“ We likewise met with three hot-water springs,” continued the first speaker, “ all lying middling close together. Two of 'em was so hot that there was no tastin' of 'em as they came up : so I drew some of the water in my cap, and let it cool, and then put my tongue to it.”

“Well?” said I.

“Well,” he said, “it isn’t sweet and it ain’t salt. To my fancy it has a taste o’ marine soap: summut as fresh water ’ud taste after ye had washed and rinsed shirts and drawers that had been wet through with salt water.”

“The spring that comes up middling warm is fairly brackish,” said his companion. “And yet, at a stretch, I dunno that all three fountains mightn’t be drunk without harm.”

“And the rain water?” I asked.

“That’s right enough, sir. I dipped my hand in, and sucked my fingers. It’s good water.”

“There’s another collection of fresh water up nigh that mast,” said the bo’sun. “We each took a drink of it out of my mate’s cap, and ye wouldn’t know it from the water in the breakers we brought with us. But it appears to me as if these here rain-water ponds dry up fast. We ought to find some means of storing what there is in ’em; for this weather,” said he, looking up at the sky, “may last for another month, and if there’s to be nothen’ for us to drink but hot water tastin’ like the rinsings of sailors’ shirts, we’d better turn to and think over some dodge for preserving what is left in the hartificial ponds.”

“Don’t talk of another month!” cried Aunt Damaris.

“I’m only looking ahead, mum,” responded the

bo'sun, with a dismal squint at the shawl on the hill-top. It was but a tiny object—a barely noticeable thing—viewed even from our short distance from it; and I saw Shilling involuntarily shake his head as he withdrew his eyes from it. Afraid that he might say something to deepen the fit of despondency that had seized my darling, I changed the subject by asking what other reports they could give us of their explorations. “Did you come across any vegetables?”

“Here and there,” said one of them, “we’d spy a bit of a root that might ha’ passed for parsley; but we dursn’t taste it, for fear that it might be poisonous.”

“I saw,” said another, “what looked to be the head of a carrot; I hove it out o’ the soil, but nothing came along with it but dirt, clingin’ to a set o’ roots like the claws of a crab.”

“I observed the same object,” exclaimed the bo'sun; “and when I hauled, nothen’ but dirt came up too.”

“I don’t reckon,” said the man who had been his companion, “that there’s anything fit to eat in the shape of vegetables growin’ upon this island. There’s plenty o’ goats: the bo'sun and me counted height, all lumped together, on the slope away to the westwards. Something startled ’em, and we saw them run. If they’re only to be

cotched by our chasin' of 'em, I allow that they'll keep us fasting."

"They'll not be caught," said I, "by our sitting here wondering *how* we are to catch them. You seem to be settling into doleful views, my lads. Isn't it something that you should have found plenty of fresh water? And on the top of that there are goats enough to keep us in fresh meat for six months. You say they're not to be caught. How do you know? It isn't sailor-fashion to give up without trying."

"Mates, Mr. Seymour is quite right," exclaimed the bo'sun. "We'll be more cheerful when we've had some rest, sir."

"Well," said I, "why don't those of you who are dead-beaten go and lie down? You'll find the boat's sail in that hut there; and here," said I, pulling off my coat, "is a pillow for one of you; and there are clothes enough amongst you to make out as many bolsters as you'll want."

On this all of them but the bos'un got up, and went lurching and scrambling wearily to the hut.

"They'll air the building for the ladies," said Shilling, following them with his eyes. "Poor fellows! they've had a tough time of it since the night of the collision. Ladies, sorry to see ye looking so downcast. You shouldn't think there's much the matter yet."

"Oh, Mr. Shilling," cried Florence, "our prospects are utterly hopeless!"

"Can't see it, miss, beggin' your pardon," he answered. "We've only been landed a few hours, and unless we're to suppose that a ship had caught sight of us, and followed in our wake all last night, it wouldn't be reasonable to expect anything to heave in sight *yet*. Ye must give chance and luck time, miss. If after hexercising your patience nothen' turns up, why then Mr. Seymour here I dessay 'll agree with me that the best thing we can do is for some of us to go away in the gig and seek help to the norrards. There's bound to be ships somewhere about there, voyaging to Australia, or sailing or steaming westwards; and I, for one, shall be quite willing to go off in the boat, and knock about till a vessel passes by."

"That's one chance anyway," said I, looking at Florence. "Trust me, our prospects are not utterly hopeless."

"Pity there's nothen' to make a flare of," exclaimed the bo'sun, leaning on his elbow and leisurely gazing round him. "Never see a bit of land with grass growin' on it so bare of bush as this here blooming rock. Would it be worth while, Mr. Seymour, stripping the roof off that hut to make a fire of, if a sail should heave in view?"

"No, Shilling. The shelter is too valuable.

Besides, you've got to consider that this is a volcanic island with vapour regularly oozing out of parts of it—as you can see; and any smoke we made would, in my opinion, be set down as a natural thing, having nothing to do with people in distress."

"That is quite probable," said Aunt Damaris, cocking her eye at her shawl up in the sky.

"It's a small signal," I continued, noticing that the bo'sun and Florence followed the old lady's gaze; "but small as it is, I have no doubt that in clear weather like this, and with the aid of a good glass, such as most ships carry, it will be distinctly visible at the distance of the horizon."

"Well, I dessay it may," said the bo'sun, speaking as if to hide his doubts. It was plain he had no opinion of that shawl as a signal, and was a good deal worried and disappointed by the very small result of his exceedingly heavy labour.

"Meanwhile," said I, "we must go to work and find out how we are to provide ourselves with food whilst we remain here. Be our stay short or long, we shall want to eat."

"That's sartin," remarked Shilling.

"We ought to be able to knock over some of those goats with my pistol," said I. "It has five chambers loaded, and I've got thirty or forty cartridges in my pocket. By creeping carefully, and watching them just before the dusk settles

down, we should be able to draw near enough to kill one of them with a pistol."

"Yes," said the bo'sun; "but my notion is that our best chance of getting enough to eat lays in that water there,"—pointing to the lake. "If it ain't full of fish, and lobsters, and crabs, and the likes of such harticles of food as them, I'll swallow my boots. The job'll be to get 'em out of the water. There's nothen' I can think of as we could fashion into hooks."

"I have some hair-pins!" exclaimed Aunt Damaris, putting her hand to her bonnet.

"I'm afraid they'd prove too soft to hold a fish," said I.

"Will you let me see 'em, mum," observed the bo'sun.

Whereupon, to save her aunt the trouble of removing her bonnet, Florence drew one from the noble coil of hair she carried under her hat. The bo'sun worked it about with his great tarry fingers, and then said "he was afeard the wire'd prove too pliant: still, there was no tellin'; something might hook himself upon it and not be able to wriggle off; only the end 'ud want sharpening, for this here point," said he, trying it with his thumb, "would never pierce a fish's jaw, and it 'ud need a month's rubbin' against stone to bring it keen. The worst of shipwreck is, it leaves folks without conveniences. If we'd brought the car-

penter's tool-chest along with us, we'd be having biled fish for supper to-night, I warrant. Failin' hooks, Mr. Seymour, the next dodge must be to convart the boat's sail into a kind o' trawl, and sweep the water there as deep as we can let it go. There's no conceivin' what it might bring up."

Well, for a whole hour we thus sat talking. It did my darling and her poor old aunt good to listen and make suggestions, by forcing them to exercise their minds in other ways than that of brooding over our situation ; and I was very careful to constantly slip in hopeful fancies, making much of the strange absence or disappearance of the boats, by begging my companions to consider that, whatever the fate of the rest of the crew and passengers might prove to be, we at all events were safe ; we had come through a dark dangerous night, were on solid ground, with no fear of perishing from the want of water anyway, with plenty of food at hand which we were bound to come at after a little thinking and planning, and enough in the hut to last us for five or six days ; and, finally, we were upon an island that was sighted by eighty out of every hundred vessels sailing eastwards. But for all that, my secret views of our prospects were fearfully gloomy. When I recall what I really thought, I am amazed that I should have been able to speak hopefully and cheerfully—I mean, in such a manner as to convince the others

that I was sincere. I'd catch Florence studying my face, and reading me with her sweet, anxious, sad eyes, till I could have broken down under their imploring, pitiful, questioning expression. Yet it would not do to let her heart droop: the finest spirit will sink if once the conviction comes that there is no hope; and my struggle was to keep hope alive before her, ay, and before her poor old relative, whose age made her, in such a helpless abandoned desolate condition as we were in, an object of deep compassion. But, as I say, my own views of our situation were so dark, that, outside the small chance our despatching the gig to cruise about out of sight of the island to the north might give us, there was hardly a hope I could form. A hundred ships at the distance of ten or twelve miles might pass by; but what means had we—if that miserably small signal on the hill-top failed to attract their attention—of making our existence known? Even if smoke could have called their notice to us, we had no means of producing smoke. Some of us, it is true, might start in pursuit of a sail in the gig; but the boat's sole chance would lie in a dead calm, that should keep the ship at rest, and enable us to use our oars; and I could not forget that the prevailing winds in summer here were northerly, so that ships passing to the northwards of the island—and unless we climbed to the top of the crater

to keep a look-out up there, we should be unable to see the ocean from north-west to south-east—would have us dead to leeward of them. Our main reliance, then, must be upon the chance of a vessel touching at this island, or being attracted by our little signal which was all we had to hoist; for the boat's sail would have hung up and down, as would a jacket or cloak. And the odds, as I considered, of such a stroke of luck happening were so heavily opposed to us, that I hardly knew how to hope, what to think; and nothing but the imperative obligation laid upon me by my love for Florence, and the manhood expected from me by her aunt, could have prevented me from sinking into as bitterly despondent a temper as I had noticed in my darling.

The time wore away slowly. The men lay in the hut during the greater part of the afternoon. I looked in upon them when I climbed, for the second time, past the structure to search the ocean for a sign of the boats, and could just distinguish their figures lying upon the sail or the patches of grass, all as motionless as corpses, though the sound of their deep breathing rose up strong from the ground, and made the gloom so solemn that it bred a kind of awe in a man to stand there and listen. The bo'sun, after he had done talking to us, went to the boat—to seek for something there, as I supposed; but losing sight of him, and wondering

what on earth had become of him, I walked to the boat, and, peering into her, found my friend dead asleep, at full length in her bottom, with his arm for a pillow, and his legs stretched along under the thwarts.

When I had come down from looking at the sea for the second time, it was with deep disappointment and wonder. I had secretly hoped throughout the morning, and even during the early part of the afternoon, that some of the boats would be heaving in sight; but when, between half-past three and four, I gazed into the distant blue from a height of nearly two hundred feet, and saw nothing, then indeed I made up my mind to abandon all thought of counting upon the long-boat as a means of fetching us help. It was a bitter blow, bitterer than I can express; for though, to be sure, we had brought the gig through the rough seas of last night in safety, she was the least fitted of all the *Strathmore's* boats to encounter turbulent weather. Next to the long-boat I should have chosen one of the quarter-boats, furnished with tubular air-tight casings; but now we were to be left with only the gig—a narrow, shallow boat, in which to be sure a couple or three of us might without much risk sail away to a distance of thirty or forty miles to the norrard, in fine clear weather, on the look-out for ships, but in which we should be mad to attempt to

quit the island on the chance of being picked up or else of sailing straight on through the hundreds of leagues of ocean which separated us from Africa and Australia.

All this while, Florence and Aunt Damaris remained near the spot on which we had landed, sometimes moving to stretch their limbs, but for the most part sitting on the low narrow ledge to which I had originally conducted them. I had them full in my sight as I came down the slope, and the thoughts they put into me, coupled with the wild trouble the absence of the boats occasioned, forced me into the slowest possible movements, that I might have leisure to calm my mind and smooth my face before I confronted them. I asked myself, If we are doomed to linger upon this rock, how are those women to manage? They have but the clothes in which they stand, and no means of repairing them. What, in God's name, am I to do for them if the period of our imprisonment should swell from days into weeks, from weeks into months? It was enough to raise a kind of madness in me, to think of *that*. I'd look from them to the hut that was to shelter them; then round the precipitous crater-walls, and wonder how we were to get food; and all through these horrible hopeless thoughts would run the passion of my love for the gentle beautiful girl whose pale face looked towards me as I approached, till the manhood in me seemed as if

it would melt away, and leave me a weeping idiot, fit only to mumble for mercy with my eyes upon the sky.

By the time I had come to them, however, I had got a good grip of my mind once more; and having found out where the bo'sun was, I went up to Florence, took a seat beside her, and held her hand.

"All, but us three," said I, "are snoring at the top of their pipes. Darling, you must be frightfully tired; and you, too, Miss Hawke. Remember you have had no sleep for two nights."

"I could not lie down upon these rocks," replied Aunt Damaris, with a smile so painful that it was like being wounded to see it.

"No," said I; "but the boat's sail folded would make a soft mattress for you and Florence; and if you wish for rest, I'll have those fellows up there off that sail in a trice."

My darling's fingers tightened upon mine as she said, "I could not sleep *there*."

"Why not?" I exclaimed. "You will sleep there to-night. You must be under shelter."

She shuddered, but made no reply.

"It's a mere matter of imagination," I continued. "When you are asleep and resting peacefully, as you will, it's all the same whether you lie dreaming in a desolate hut like that or in your own bedroom at home."

"Oh, Jack, not when the morning comes!" she cried.

"I could not sleep if I were to lie down, Mr. Seymour," said Aunt Damaris. "I would rather remain here, in the open air. Did you see anything when you were up on the cliff just now?"

"Nothing."

She sighed convulsively, and turned her eyes up to heaven with her hands clasped.

"Let the night pass, let us all get what refreshment we can find in sleep," said I, "and to-morrow our clearer heads will enable us to see if there is any daylight in this situation of ours. Don't despair. You have shown great courage, and both of you have confronted the perils we have been brought into with stout hearts. Besides, did you not say you have confidence in me? Don't dishearten me by causing me to think you have lost faith."

"I have not lost faith, Jack," cried Florence, passionately. "If there's anything a sailor could think of to be done, you'd do it, it would come to you. But I know you are as hopeless as aunt and I——"

"No, no!" I exclaimed.

"I cannot be deceived," she continued; "I have watched you looking around—I have watched you thinking: you cannot hide your thoughts from me." And there was such a depth of sadness

and love in the tearful eyes she fixed upon me, that the only answer I could give her right off was to throw my arm around her and hold her to my heart. She hid her face on my breast, and, kissing her cheek, I looked at Aunt Damaris over my loved one's head.

"May I feel," I said, "that, come what may, Miss Hawke, this girl, whom I love as never was woman better loved, is mine with your consent?"

She answered immediately, "Yes. You deserve her, Mr. Seymour. I hope God may spare you and her to come together as man and wife. I have no doubt of your unselfish devotion. I have seen enough to convince me that your hearts are one. Florence's papa shall know the truth——" And then she stopped short, with a wild glance around her.

I whispered, "You hear what your aunt says. My sweet one, can you believe that the Almighty has brought us together here to miserably perish? Oh, for His sake keep up your heart—have faith in His love and protection. No one who knows the sea and its chances would dream of abandoning hope till the darkness of death itself has come down." And then, raising my voice, "Miss Hawke, is it not true that every shipwreck is full of miraculous deliverance? Look at that little boat there, and recall the sea she carried us through last night." And being strangely elated by what the old lady

had said to me, and by having my darling in my arms, I turned to and spun them all the yarns of wonderful escapes at sea which I could think of. Scores of them I knew : of a wave washing a man overboard in a pitch-black night and bringing him safely back again, setting him down tenderly on his stern, and leaving him in peace to squeeze the salt out of his eyes ; of five men living on the bottom of a capsized schooner, dining and supping for six days off barnacles and weed with a drink of beer between whiles, which they came at by cutting a hole in the planking and thrusting in their hands till they arrived at a case of bottled ale ; of others successfully performing a six-weeks' voyage in a small open boat, their sole food during half the time having been a dog, some flying-fish, and a few mollemokes ; of a seaman knocking about for four days in a lifebelt, and then being picked up alive, and made hearty in twenty-four hours by a liberal prescription of rum and roast pork. These were but samples of the yarns I told them, every one of them gospel-true, though as Florence listened I'd see a gleam of incredulity shoot into her eyes, which would set me laughing ; for with true land-going instincts, she'd doubt the very things which seafaring people would accept as ordinary incidents of the marine life. Yet this yarning was profitable work. The obligation of thinking for stories kept me lively, and I was

listened to with interest—Aunt Damaris, in particular, often rounding off a tale by saying, “Well, Florence, I am sure after *that* we have no right to despair;” “Why, their case was far worse than ours, certainly, and yet they were saved!” and the like.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when the bo'sun shoved his head above the gunwale of the gig, and then stood up, stretching his arms with a great roaring yawn. He looked about him as if he couldn't make up his mind to believe in what he saw in a hurry, and then, spying us, he got out of the boat.

“'Fraid I've been having a pretty long nap, sir,” said he.

“No, not very long,” I replied; “but you'll be the better for what you've had.”

He asked me the time, which I gave him, adding that the ladies would be wanting something to eat, and that the men had better be roused out.

“Ye've not been sitting here ever since, ladies, have you?” he asked.

Florence replied, “Yes.”

“I hope,” said he, “it's not because there's only the hut to use, and you wouldn't enter it whilst the men were there. If I thought *that*, I'd have the whole blooming lot of 'em out of it by the hair of their head in a trice.”

“We preferred to remain in the open air,” observed Aunt Damaris.

"Any signs of the boats, Mr. Seymour?" he asked.

"There was nothing to be seen when I last looked," I answered.

He glanced up at the signal he had erected, and then at the sky, and walked a short distance beyond the boat, where the trend of the rocks sloping to the breakwater would carry him past the cliff and give him a view of the sea in the east. There he stood for a few moments staring, and then singing out to me, "Nothen' in sight but blue water, and beautifully blue it is, to be sure," he rejoined us. "What's the next thing to be done, sir?" he asked.

I told him to rouse out the men, and bring materials enough for supper for all hands with him, along with wine for the ladies. This he did, and after a few minutes the men emerged one by one from the hut, rubbing their eyes, and stretching themselves, and gazing around them as Shilling had when he awoke. They gathered about us, sitting on the grass, whilst I divided the preserved meat and biscuit, and handed Florence and her aunt some wine, leaving the bo'sun to serve out the rum to the men. They seemed the better for their rest, less hollow-eyed, and they were brisker in their movements. They looked concerned enough when the bo'sun told them that neither the ladies nor I had slept, and one of them said shyly to

Aunt Damaris, "Hope, mum, it wasn't our being in the hut as kept you out of it. We went there because Mr. Seymour, here, told us to go; but the grass outside is plenty soft enough for us to lie on——"

I stopped his apologies by telling him the ladies preferred to wait for the night to use the hut; "and then, my lads," said I, "it'll be for us men to consider whether it shouldn't be occupied by them and nobody else."

"It don't want considerin', Mr. Seymour," exclaimed the bo'sun; "it's a settled job. That hedifice is for the use of the ladies only, mates; am I right or am I wrong?"

"Right!" they all answered.

Florence began to remonstrate.

"No, no!" I interrupted. "We're sailors here. We all know what's due to ladies. The men mean that you and your aunt shall occupy that hut, and you'll vex them by declining."

"Yes, you'll vex us all, miss," exclaimed the bo'sun.

"But where will you sleep?" she asked.

"Why, on the small of our backs, miss," he answered. "Men like us, who are accustomed to the softest plank we can pick out in a ship's deck for a snooze, aren't going to make much account of a plot o' grass for a feather-bed, even though there should be nothen' under the verdure but

rock. Consider how them goats we've seen exist; and ye may reckon that the sailor who isn't the equal of a goat in everything but jumpin', must be the poorest o' poor creatures, and fit only to list as a soger." The others murmured assent. "But," continued the honest fellow, "I don't know that Mr. Seymour isn't entitled to a corner of that hut,—say the part close 'longside the door. You see, ladies, 'cording to his own account he's knocked off the sea now three year and more; in that time you may take it a good lump of shore-going henervation has got mixed up in his blood, his hands have growed white, and the smell of the tar-bucket has pretty nigh gone off him. Consequently he's not to be treated like these here out-an'-outers,"—pointing among the men, who grinned broadly to the compliment; "and if you can spare him a bit of that old roof yonder, just to keep the doo off his face, I dare say ye'll find him thankful for your kindness."

Florence smiled, and Aunt Damaris said, "I certainly couldn't dream of sleeping with my niece alone in that dreadful hut, Mr. Shilling. I could only consent to use it on condition that Mr. Seymour is with us."

"Well, that clinches it, anyway," said the bo'sun, looking at me gravely.

"Will any watches be kept going?" asked one of the men.

"That is as you please," I answered. "As we have no means of making our existence known by night-signals, I don't see that any good can be done by keeping a look-out. It's a mighty pity, Shilling, that Captain Thompson, in ordering the boats to be victualled, should have forgotten to give us rockets and blue lights."

"There was an armful put into the long-boat," said one of the men.

"But none in the gig," I exclaimed. "Perhaps he never doubted that the boats would fetch this island, in which case the long-boat's stock would do for all."

"There's always something forgot in these here cases that's terribly missed when it's too late," observed the bo'sun.

"To return to the question of watches," said I. "There's plenty to look out for, but there's nothing to signal with. I don't know, therefore, that a regular look-out is necessary. On and off you'll be awake through the night, as I shall; and any man who wakes up can do no harm by taking a look round."

"I fancy that'll be all that's necessary, sir," remarked the bo'sun, with a despondent squint at the shawl flying on the eminence above the slope.

"One of you will please get the lamp trimmed, ready for lighting in the hut," said I. "And now,

my lads, if you feel up to the mark, after your rest, you can't better kill the time than by looking about you for a sheltered nook to lie in during the night; and some of you might overhaul these rocks here, round that lake, for crabs or anything else eatable; whilst others can't do better than make another exploring trip. Where's my coat?"

"In the hut, sir," answered one of the men.

I desired him to fetch it, and when he had returned I pulled out the pistol and gave it to the bo'sun, telling him it might be worth his while to try his hand upon a goat with it. He might drop upon one unawares, I said, and if he could kill it, it would be a valuable addition to our stock of provisions. The men seemed to relish this programme. Two hours stood between us and sundown, sleep had freshened them, and the interest of groping and hunting about would keep up their spirits even if no more serviceable result followed. As for myself, mental suffering and the want of rest had left me fairly exhausted, and such was my painful and distressing lassitude, that had my life depended upon my climbing a couple of hundred feet of those rocks I must have perished, for the task would have been utterly beyond me. Pulling out sticks of tobacco, the men proceeded to cut pieces of the stuff into their tar-stained hands and load their pipes; then, emptying the

pannikin of rum-and-water amongst them, they got on to their feet and dispersed in couples, leaving Florence and Aunt Damaris and myself in the place we had hung about pretty nearly the whole of that long miserable day.

CHAPTER X.

SOLITUDE.

SLOWLY the sun westered, going down right astern of the island, until the whole shadow of the crater was upon its own lake, and you saw the red tinge in the sky, up past the high volcanic walls, melting easterly into glorious liquid blue with not a cloud to sully the exquisite tinge of it. The lake took a gray gleam in the shadow, but trembling into it was the sunset colour overhead, that came floating down more like haze than irradiation, so that the gray tint appeared to be *under* the faint flush instead of mixed up with it, and the steely light rose fair off the face of the sheet of water, striking clear through the warm rosiness of the atmosphere. It was *then* the stillest scene mortal eye ever looked upon: not a tremor was there in the lake; not a sound in the air, if you save the distant low washing hum of surf that was more like the silence making itself heard than noise itself. Gradually the dusk came stealing out of the ocean confronted by the entrance to the

island ; and we had twilight in the heart of that deep cup, and the pale glimmer that night flings upon water was on the lake when the sky was still blue with daylight above us.

The first of the men to return was the bo'sun. He said, as he gave me back my pistol, that all the goats he could see were at the northernmost end of the island, down hill, and not hard to come at, he dared say, if it hadn't been that he didn't relish the prospect of the climb back in the eye of the coming dusk. "But I've got no doubt in my own mind," he added, "that they're to be cotched by our breakin' of ourselves up into hunting parties, with you in the centre lying hid to shoot 'em as they're drove your way."

Presently the others arrived, one of them carrying an immense crab, which he let drop into a deepish hole in the cliff near us, saying that it would lie there snug till the morning, and could then be cooked in one of the hot springs, and that he only brought it along as a sample, for there were scores of the like of *it* knocking about among the rocks over yonder,—pointing to the edge of the lake in the north-west, about a quarter of a mile distant. This was the best piece of news that had been given us that day.

"Miss Hawke," said I, "Florence, my darling, let me conduct you now to that hut, and see you comfortably stwoed away for the night."

In the twilight I saw the old lady turn her face towards the dismal shanty ; whilst my darling, with something of a convulsive gesture, passed her hand through my arm.

"I suppose we must lie down there—there's no help for it," said Aunt Damaris, in a vibratory voice. And so speaking, she rose up. I requested the bo'sun to give her a hand to climb the slope that stretched betwixt us and the hut, and they slowly moved off, Florence and I following.

"You'll not leave us alone there, Jack?" moaned my poor frightened pet. "Oh, I'd a thousand times rather remain awake all night and keep here, out of doors, with you!"

"My sweet girl, you want rest ; you'll break down if you don't get some sleep," I answered. "You're not a rough sailor who can throw himself down on the grass here, and fall a-snoring without thought of the animals that may crawl into his ears and the lumps of stone that may fit in under his shoulder-blades. Already the dew is heavy, and in an hour or two the grass will be as wet as if a thunder-shower had passed. The hut will keep you clear of the damp, and there is nothing to fear in the old shanty itself."

She said no more ; but, all the time, I could see she recoiled from the idea of lying in that grim dark hole of a structure ; it was a sort of grave, I believe, in her sight,—a place where shipwrecked

men had died ; and a hundred times over, I know, would she rather have kept awake all that night out in the open, and seen the stars clear over her, than have put that roof betwixt her and their light. But it was out of the question, in my opinion, and that was enough for me, who valued her life and health many times above mine ; and I think she felt the sort of command my love lay upon her, by the way she stopped reasoning, and climbed at my side up the slope after her aunt.

The lamp was alight in the hut, and the fellow who had trimmed it had slung it to a rusty old nail that was half buried in the wall near the door. Up in a corner were our provisions, a fearfully slender stock for nine of us, and quite enough to make a man's heart cold in him to see. The boat's sail lay stretched upon the dark ground, and that was the whole of the furniture in that hut. The bo'sun and I picked it up, and doubled it over so that one half would serve as a cover and the other as a mattress ; I then made a pillow of my jacket and of Florence's waterproof cloak : and this being all that could be manufactured in the shape of a bed, I asked them to lie down, and I would cover them with the half of the sail.

"Heaven preserve us, what a bedroom !" cried Aunt Damaris, gazing around her with horror.

"Jack," exclaimed Florence, "how are you going to sleep ? You cannot lie upon this hard ground."

"I shall take a snooze Hindoo-fashion," said I: "by squatting. There's a soft corner there,"—pointing to the right of the door; "and I shall sit in it like a Chinese joss, and dream that I am being worshipped."

"If a man could take turn and turn about with them there joshes," exclaimed the bo'sun, grinning, "I'm one as 'ud volunteer fast enough for the job. Why, sir, they're made holler, and the people as goes to chapel to 'em fills 'em up with hofferings, such as earrings and brooches, and valuables of that kind. I'd be a Josh and welcome. But what d'ye want to sit up in that corner for, Mr. Seymour? There's a fair patch o' grass under your feet where you're standing now. Couldn't you lay down on that, with your elbow for a pillow?"

"Oh, I'll manage somehow or other; don't trouble about me, Shilling," I replied. "Now, Miss Hawke, pray set Florence an example by lying down. Once you are on the soil you'll both fall sound asleep."

"You have given me your coat," said my darling.

"Because you want a pillow, and the coat smothers me, my pet," I answered.

She looked as if she would beg me to take the coat, but I held up my hand in deprecation of her entreaty, so she hung her head, and stood without speaking. Aunt Damaris took off her bonnet,

and, putting on her cloak, pulled the hood of it over her head; then stepped upon the sail and sat down. I asked Florence to let me remove her hat, but she did this herself, and, getting on to the sail, placed herself alongside her aunt. They then lay back, and I snugged the half of the sail over them; but my heart was made so full by the sight of them upon the hard ground, with nothing between them and it but the sail, that I could barely falter out, "God bless you both—good night," and turned hastily to join the bo'sun, who stood in the door.

"Poor ladies!" he mumbled in a low voice. "Fond as ye are of the sweetest of 'em, sir, it's a bitter hard trial to you, I reckon. But it might ha' been worse, Mr. Seymour. It's a shelter anyway; though — may the Lord deliver us!—the rummiest of the kind as ever I see."

"Why, it comes home to me, as you say, Shilling," I exclaimed, "not only because one of them is my sweetheart, and the other an old lady, but because they're both accustomed to all the comforts and luxuries that money can buy, and less fitted than scores of other folks to endure such hardships as these. Great God!" I muttered, with a glance at them, "what a leveller is shipwreck, bo'sun! It's next to death in the power of killing distinctions."

"Well, Mr. Seymour," said he, "take my advice

now, and turn to and get some rest yourself. Ye've had no sleep for two nights and three days, and we don't want you to break down, for if we're to get out o' this cursed mess it'll be you that'll show us the road. If you think you're likely to miss your jacket you're welcome to my vestcoat, sir. These here sleeves'll keep your arms warm."

I thanked him heartily, but declined his offer, bidding him remember that I should lie under shelter, whereas he was to find a bed among the rocks.

"Well, good night, sir. No use," said he, "of worrying ourselves with talkin' over our chances and what's to be done. I'll go and see where the men are. Some of us 'ud better hang near the boat, I think, to mind that she don't break away in the night."

"Ay," said I, "see to that, for Heaven's sake."

We shook hands, and he went away. I felt it was a hard necessity indeed that put these poor fellows upon sleeping out in the damp: but it was their own wish; I doubt if I could have persuaded the bo'sun to use the hut, and if he declined the others would have gone on refusing. And then, again, the fear that Florence and her aunt would have stubbornly objected to lie down amidst the seamen, and thus through the reasonable prejudice of an insurmountable instinct of delicacy, or modesty, or whatever you like, have given the men offence,

had weighed greatly with me. At all events my darling was *first*: it was better that the sailors should suffer than she; and even if she had consented to occupy the hut with the seamen, the suffering her sense of delicacy must have endured from the participation would have been an intolerable thing for me to notice through the night without being able to relieve it.

They both lay very still. I should have been glad' to slip out and take a look around me, but they were awake, and would be alarmed if I quitted them; so, very quietly, I sat myself down in the corner I had fixed upon, where the wall propped up my back, and, stretching out my legs and folding my arms, dropped my chin on my breast and shut my eyes. Painfully wearied I was; my eyelids weighed like lead; but a long while passed before I dosed. I heard the faint hum of the surf; and the threadlike breathings from the sail. It was a fearful silence to listen to with the sense in you of being on a little rock amid leagues of ocean, whose surf washed the shores of remote parts of the world. It affected me like a nightmare rather than a real thing, when I thought *who* it was that made one of those two figures lying there. Oh, it seemed cruel, it broke into my heart with agony in the blow, to realize that *she* whom I loved so tenderly, the sweetest, the gentlest of God's creatures, my fair and tender flower, needing all

that care and comfort could do for her, should be finding a bed upon the hard ground, a shelter under the filthy squalid roof of a hut, erected by God knows whom, and for what purpose, with such a prospect of continued hardship before her, if succour should be delayed or did not come, that I dared not think into it, to follow it for even a little distance. What had become of the other boats? Suppose Morecombe were in my place, and I had never taken this voyage? If we were spared, how would old Hawke receive me? These and a hundred such conjectures and speculations and fancies trooped through my mind till nature could hold out no longer, and sitting there in my shirt-sleeves, with my arms folded, and the lamp shining dimly upon the motionless figures under the sail, I fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

I awoke in a fit of amazement to find myself sprawling on my side. Dead sleepy I must have been not to be aroused by the gradual sliding of my shoulders along the wall till I had fairly capsized, as though I had really been an old wooden idol. I was tolerably stiff, and sat rubbing myself awhile, blinking at the lamp, that burned very faintly and barely disclosed the outline of the figures under the sail. I pulled out my watch and approached the light, and found the time a quarter past two, so that for five hours, at all events, I had slept as soundly as if I had been

mounted on a comfortable spring mattress, and with no other inconvenience than a numbness in the legs that speedily gave way to my rubbing. I bent over Aunt Damaris and Florence, and could just discern enough of their faces to perceive that they were sound asleep, the best proof of which was in their quiet regular respirations. My own slumber had wonderfully refreshed me. Picking up my cap and treading very softly, I stepped out of the hut, wishing to satisfy my mind by a look round. One felt the difference of the temperature outside; I found that the light wind had settled away into the eastward, and blew gently, fair over the breakwater, into the volcanic hollow. The darkness was marvellously fine and clear with the starlight, that floated down in a perfect gush of luminous haze into the cylindrical crater-walls, and the lake gave it back with a dim sheen that made it look like polished steel down there, glimmering in the gloom. The sky resembled a circle of black velvet ablaze with stars. There was not a fragment of vapour to obscure them. Up past the brighter stars the luminaries hung in folds of silver dust, with patches of light hove up on them shaped like comets, most of the larger orbs of an exquisite flashing pale blue, though amidst them was many a sparkling speck of rose, and one shone a vivid green on the brow of a crag in the west. All this starry glory went bright and keen past the summits

of the cliffs, and made the blackness of them loom up till they seemed miles high, and stretching backwards God knows how far. You'd notice the pale flicker on the lake this side the breakwater, where the wind set it running, but it melted into the still and silent gleam after measuring a few fathoms, and there was no other movement. It was as though the silence in the island was a weight that crushed all stirring things motionless; one's very heart was sensible of the pressure of it as a ponderous rebuke to its beating; and one's breathing came and went in a kind of stifling, as the hearing *felt* around the starlit dusk for something to relieve the enormous hush, and heard nothing but the ceaseless moaning hum of the surf outside.

My sight speedily grew accustomed to the gloom, and very carefully I made my way to that part of the horn of cliff I had before looked forth upon the sea from, groping cautiously with hands and feet, and often pausing to listen for I know not what, and to peer backwards for the sight of the figure of one of our men. Coming at last to a remembered point, I sat down on the edge of the cliff, that went with a slope into the darkness below for a hundred and fifty feet, with the ninepin-shaped rock right opposite—an ugly lumpish block, black as ink, upon the faint starry sheen upon the ocean. Poets may write of the feeling of loneliness that is bred in a man who is solitary in

crowds; but hang me if they'd talk in that style had they perched themselves on the edge of that fall of volcanic cliff as I did, and stared away into the liquid indigo that ran up to the stars over the water-line. Loneliness! why, when I put my mind upon that ocean, and considered how many leagues of it there were there, I felt to be hove clear of the familiar globe altogether, to be poised somewhere betwixt the stars and the earth where there was nothing but eternal gloom and eternal stillness, faintly broken maybe by the rushing of spirit-wings, just as I'd hear the wind softly pouring with a moaning and a rustling against the cliff I overlooked and among the rocks, that soared up in a sloping tower of ink behind me, with such a mystification of gloom in them that they showed like an immense mountain. Even the stars which I knew so well took an unfamiliar aspect through the inexpressible sense of loneliness that was put into me. One could almost fancy one looked at them from some other planet than ours, so bright and yet so distant they seemed, with the wan flicker of meteors sailing among them, and the dark sea hollow beneath. Up past the edge of the cliff the sound of the surf came with a clearer edge; there was a gurgling and sobbing noise of water about the ninepin rock, and a faint seething stole along all the way to the left of me, where the base of the island rounded

into the north and east. Look as I would, there was nothing to be seen. And I *did* look, God knows, with the intensity of a man who feels that his life depends upon his eyes: yet I don't know that I was greatly troubled by seeing nothing; my mind was in a manner subdued and numbed by the wonder of the vast dark lonely silence amid which I seemed to feel myself the only sentient thing. I'd glance away from the ocean to the towering heights of the ebony crater-walls, which swept in a circle, or nearly a circle, under the stars, taking in their light only to fling what illumination there was in it upon the lake; and the grey dim gleam of *that* in the huge cup-shaped shadow was enough to put the sweat upon a man's forehead, and to set his mind roaming horribly.

It is not everywhere that you can realize distance; but in this island of St. Paul's you may most startlingly, as I know by experience; for you have but to climb a bit to get a whole view of the rock with the sea circling it; and when you are alone at night upon it, and there is no sound but the surf or the plaining of the wind in a crevice you can't see, and the lake glimmers back the starlight in a dull faint surface of luminous gray, the immensity of the deep in the middle of which you stand is a crushingly realizable thing. You look eastwards, and the imagination rushes through the darkness for hundreds upon hundreds of miles to

the distant Australian coast ; northwards, to the far-off shores washed by the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal ; southwards, to where the fields of giant kelp are hurled against the ice-barrier past which, so one dreams, the sea-lion and the walrus, the penguin and the albatross have their home ; westwards, beyond the African Cape to the bleak and roaring ocean that divides the Horn from the South Shetlands. Well, I can say that the chart of it all was in my brain as I stood peering at the dim sea and then at the black heights, till the fearful liquid immensity that gloomed round this point of rock, that had day and night upon either extremity of its spacious surface at one time, frightened my fancy into nightmares. Dreams of wrecks which had happened here rose in me ; then I'd think of the castaways who had died in the island, along with other womanly hysterical things of the like kind ; and I remember fancying that this volcanic rock, that once filled the sky with blood-red light, had stood in the ocean ever since the day when God created the earth out of the ebony void that surrounded me, and that it was the Almighty's record of the date of the creation written upon the bosom of the deep, upon the greatest of all the ocean-stretches ; and being *on* it, why, I shivered to think of what it signified : an awe fell upon me as though I stood upon ground which, like the holy mount in the Scrip-

tures, had known the visible presence of the King of kings ; and for some minutes such a spell seized hold of me as might have bereft a man, capable of deeper thinking and higher imaginings than I, of his brains. It was all mystery and gloom, with the stars looking down into a huge cup of rock that stored memories which forced the mind back to a time when this earth rolled out of space, black and silent and without life upon it ; with the sound of the surf moaning athwart the night wind that went with a wail past the ear, and the dark sea vanishing in a distance that would make the soul of a castaway man recoil from the meaning of it. To this hour, when I think of what came into my head as I crouched upon the cliff-edge, peering here and there, I feel the damp in the palms of my hands, and my heart beats as fast as a baby's.

With a determined breaking away from the horrible mood that was fast growing and deepening in me, I crept down again to the hut ; and the moment I gained it, and saw the outlines of my darling and her aunt, and the rude interior, dim in the waning lamp-light, relief came to me : but in such a way that it nearly unmanned me ; and I am not ashamed, mates, to tell you that, when I crouched in the corner afresh, I hid my face in my hands, and felt that if I could have turned to and had a hearty good blubber it would have done me a deal of good.

CHAPTER XI.

HELP.

SITTING in the corner of that hut, I closed my eyes, and after a middling long spell of wakefulness fell asleep. Dead tired I must have been, to slumber in such a posture as that. I was not fresh from a sailor's life, remember; three years of shore-going ease had made me as used to comfort as if I had never quitted it for wet and stormy watches and briny mahogany; and yet now, as before, I fell asleep with a perpendicular rubble wall for a mattress, and my shirt-sleeves for a blanket, as easily as if I had stepped from the *Strathmore's* forecastle, where, as in any other ship, a man would learn to find as comfortable a bed in the foretop as under the lee of the long-boat with one of the pigs for a pillow. But one had only to think of Aunt Damaris and Florence asleep in that hut, under a boat's sail, to guess what shipwreck and weariness will do for the most delicate of us. My slumber this time was no longer dreamless. I

think I must have passed through half a dozen of nightmares. My recent look round, and all the wild thoughts which had come into my head out of the dark island and the loneliness and the stillness, had capsized my mind, and, maybe, taking advantage of my being asleep to right itself, it tumbled and floundered and laboured so that, if I didn't screech out as a man will who dreams horribly, it was, I dare say, because I was rendered breathless by the hair-stirring visions that passed before me. What was their nature, d'ye ask? Oh, it was just a caldron of hideous things, all boiling and simmering and poppling together in it, coming up in the froth and going down, like potatoes cooking; delirious echoes of my recent waking thoughts: just as, if you shut your eyes after looking at a flashing light, you'll see a score of ghastly fires burning in the darkness, one after another, and coming up again, too, when you thought you had seen the last of them.

I was in the throes of one of these visions when a hand was laid on my shoulder; the touch was in accord with a part of my dream that made the grab of human fingers a sequential thing; and such was the effect of it upon me, that I sprang like a harlequin to my feet with a loud cry. My shout was re-echoed by Florence, and Aunt Damaris rose hastily out of the sail.

“ My God, Mr. Seymour, sir, collect your mind ! ”

said a gruff voice at my elbow ; and rubbing my eyes furiously, I turned and confronted the bo'sun. There was still a little flame left in the lamp, and the grey dawn hung like a pale mist outside the door against the cliff-side. " Mr. Seymour ! " exclaimed the bo'sun, doubtful whether I was yet awake. But I was wide awake now, and I asked him what was the matter. His voice trembled as he said, " There's a brig brought up off the island."

" *What !* " I shouted, lifting my arms and keeping them upraised.

He sprang to my side and grasped my hand. " Ay," he cried in a hurricane note, " as I live to speak it, there's a brig brought up off the entrance. She's within reach of our voices. I've left the men hailing her to bring ye the news. Oh, ladies, we'll be homeward bound now ! Hurrah ! hurrah ! "

I jumped to the door, but was arrested by a shriek from Florence. " Don't leave us, Jack ! don't leave us ! take us with you."

Heaven alone knows whether in that wild moment my darling imagined I meant to dash down to the brig, spring aboard her, and sail away to Bristol alone. But I never thought to ask ; I ran to her side, helped her off the sail, gave her her hat and her waterproof, and tumbled myself into my own coat, whilst Aunt Damaris fought

and struggled with her bonnet and cloak, and the bo'sun in the doorway stood roaring out: "It was Jim Bailey who spied her first. We all lay last night close to the gig—near to where you ladies was sittin' yesterday; Jim says he roused up and took a look seawards and spied her. Then he kicks us all round in his excitement to rouse us up, singing out that there was a brig. We all jumped up, and there sure enough she was. We see her close to and black agin' the faintness in the heast. She lies with her taw'-sails and foresail clewed up and port anchor down, waitin' for daylight, I allow, to send a boat ashore. She's a small brig, 'bout two hundred tons. Her foretop-gall'n mast's gone, an' I reckon she's in ballast by her height o' side."

"Cut along to the others," I bawled to him. "See what they are about. Send a couple of hands in the gig to her. No! hold on with the gig! Get along and be with them. We'll be with you in an instant!" And off he ran.

I trembled with excitement, and had difficulty in speaking. Fresh as I was from nightmare, I could hardly yet realize the significance of the bo'sun's news, unless it was to regard it as a continuation of my horrible visions, to be rendered by disappointment the most dreadful of them all. Within a few moments of the bo'sun's departure I had my sweetheart's and her aunt's hands in mine,

in hot pursuit of him : hot in spirit, I mean, though, thanks to the old lady, our legs were miserably slow. The light of the breaking day was thrilling into the gloom, and brightening fast along the pure and cloudless sky above the cliffs ; but *their* shadow was still upon their own slopes, and the darkness in the water yielded so slowly to the dawn, that one would have thought it was down through this craggy hollow that the hag Night vanished when the flush of pink in the East warned her that her reign was over. Carefully we had to pick our way for fear of a fall. Was it my own or their pulse that throbbed in the clutch of my fingers ? We had no word to say to one another. The moment we were clear of the hut I could see the men standing in a group on the breakwater, with their faces looking towards a part of the sea that the trend of the horn of cliff on our left made invisible to us : and they riveted my eyes. The bo'sun had just joined them, in time to hear a hail from the vessel, as I might judge by his holding up his arm, and bawling out some answer, but what it was I could not catch. In a few minutes we were among the sailors, and then we saw the brig.

I looked at her, breathing fast, still holding the hands of the women. The rim of the sun was just showing above the water, flinging a glorious sparkling beam through the rosy mist which the calm sea reflected from the sky, that was burning

with rose and gold above the luminary till the yellow reached the zenith, where it melted into blue; and that beam seemed to come like a flaming wand out of the east, to show us the brig lying within musket-shot of the shore, heaving very softly upon the exceedingly light swell, and sending to our ears the sound of the flapping of canvas and the music of running gear tautened and slackened in blocks by the rolling. Light she was and clearly in ballast—a round bowed clumsy old timber-waggon, with a big bow port, a stump main topgallant mast, her sails hanging in the clewlines; and evidence, in a fragment of foretop-gallant mast standing jagged above the topmast cross-trees, of her having been in a mess of some kind or other. A couple of deck-houses showed above her bulwarks, and over the rail betwixt the main rigging and the fore deck-house was a knot of heads, with a fellow standing up holding on to a shroud. To understand the feelings put into me—put into us all—by the sight of her, you need to be shipwrecked upon an island in the middle of the biggest ocean in the world, to have passed many hours in bitter despairful contemplation of the future, and whilst not even daring to dream of a rescue, to find all at once succour at hand. One saw the effect of it upon the women; for several moments Aunt Damaris and my darling stood staring at the brig without speaking, and I

seemed to *feel* them thinking in the tremor and the spasmodic clutchings of their fingers upon mine; then, as if it had taken her that time to understand the meaning of the vessel at anchor out there, the old lady let go of me, clasped her hands above her face, and uttered a dozen wild extravagant exclamations of rapturous delight, which in print would look sheer imbecility, though, God knows they were as appropriate to that moment as a prayer is to a church. She threw her arms round my neck, and hugged me without kissing me, left me to grasp the bo'sun's hands, shook hands with several of the others, all the time calling out and thanking God, and springing about in her old joy, and finally threw herself into Florence's arms and stood apart with her, both heartily crying, which was the best thing they could do, for the heart will be dangerously full at such moments as these.

All this takes time to relate, but it happened quickly; and from me, too, the wonder and almost paralyzing joy the sight of the brig had raised passed rapidly. I said to the bo'sun, "Are they English?"

"Yes, sir; anyway they answer in English."

"What have they been saying?"

"They've lost their boats, and have asked us to board them."

"Then," cried I, "jump into the gig, three of

you, and go you along with her, Shilling, and bring off the captain or mate, or whoever may be in charge, that I may give him our story."

This was done at once; three fellows hopped into the gig, the bo'sun jumped into the stern-sheets, and shoving off, out they stepped through the bar and headed for the brig. I then ordered the two men who remained with us to go up to the hut and fetch all the provisions and drink that they could carry in their arms. They obeyed smartly, and no sooner were Aunt Damaris and Florence and I alone, when my darling came to me. I could not help myself; the moment she was near me, and I saw the love in her gaze, and hope and joy bright on her face, I folded her in my arms, and kissed her again and again, whilst her aunt looked from us to the brig, from the brig to us with such rolling eyes that they seemed to dance in her head with the transports that filled her. The instant I let my sweetheart have her breath, she fired twenty questions into me: "Would the brig save us?" "Was she likely to sail away without us?" "Where would she carry us to if she took us off the island?" and so forth.

"No fear," said I, fondling her; "she'll save us." And going up to the old lady, I took her hand and kissed it. "Miss Hawke," said I, "yonder vessel proves that God has watched over us. My words to Florence have come true: I told her that

we should not be left to miserably perish here. But who could have believed that our imprisonment would only last a day and a night?" and I looked up at the shawl that hung in the motionless atmosphere an almost invisible thing upon the mast on the hill-top, and thought of the dreadful feeling of hopelessness with which I had watched it on the preceding day.

"Yes, Mr. Seymour," she exclaimed, "who could have believed it? Not I, for one. I never dreamt that we should escape. Oh, what a fearful time we have passed through! When shall we go on board the vessel?"

"I hope as soon as I have had a talk with the captain of her."

"Let it be soon, dear Mr. Seymour," she cried; "my feet yearn to leave this horrid rock. I feel as if I could jump from here to the ship."

"You shan't be kept waiting if I can help it," said I. "Strange that I did not sight her last night. The breeze was light, and she must have been near the island when I turned out to take a look round, or she could not have fetched that anchorage at daybreak. Probably she came up from the north-west—a part of the sea out of my view up where I posted myself. Did you sleep well, Miss Hawke?"

"Quite soundly," she replied. Florence also said she had slept well, and neither of them seemed the worse for the hard bed they had lain on.

Apparently we were to have another brilliant calm day. The sun had risen clear of the sea, and was shining white in the blue, levelling its glorious flood of silver into the hollow crater through the entrance facing east, and flashing up the water of the lake till the strong light seemed to float off it and make a veil through which you caught a glimpse of the blocks and crags of rock mirrored this side its circular margin. The boat was alongside the brig, and the bo'sun had clambered over the rail. The sound of the voices of the fellows in the gig, talking to some men hanging over the vessel's rail, came very clear along the oil-like azure glint. Presently the two sailors arrived from the hut, bearing what provisions and bottles they could carry. I made them set the things down, and the five of us went to breakfast, leaving the others to take their meal when they arrived. But Florence and her aunt could only make a show of eating: they were too deeply moved and excited to feel hungry. Mates, I declare that the horrible mess the collision had hove us into was almost worth enduring for the sake of seeing the life and hope and delight of my darling stealing and brightening out of her loveliness now that help was come. She could not downright smile, perhaps, because remembrance and what had now happened held between them too much of the pathos that goes to the making of a sadness that's

as much pleasure as grief to allow happiness to depict itself in that way in her ; but the light of her heart, that had opened like a flower since the dawn broke, lay on her sweet and adorable face ; every glance she gave me was a look of deepest love ; and could I have had my way, such was my passion of gratitude and happiness, I'd have taken her hand and climbed with her to where God's heaven would show visible all round, and knelt with her there alone and thanked Him. It would have been a prayer for us two sweethearts to remember in after years—a thanksgiving to God close to the sky, upon a rock where His presence was felt in a sense no church nor cathedral could reach up to, amid the mighty solitude of the boundless ocean. But I could not carry her off alone for such a purpose, and so I said nothing about it ; but often have I regretted since that she and I missed the prayer we could have put up in that way, and the memory that would have been born of it.

We were eating and talking, asking the men how they had slept, speculating about the reason the brig had in calling at this island, making conjectures about the other boats, and so on, when we heard the splash of oars and the creak of rowlocks, and saw the gig making for the breakwater with a stranger seated alongside the bo'sun. He was a square-shouldered, burnt-up seaman, apparently

a forecastle hand, dressed in an old Scotch cap and a well-worn jersey. He stared hard at us, as if the sight of the ladies surprised him; and when he got out of the boat he followed the bo'sun with the most rolling walk I ever saw in a seafaring man.

"This is Mr. Seymour," said the bo'sun, indicating me to him, "the passenger as had charge of the boat; and these here are the ladies,"—as if the fellow could not see *that* for himself. Then addressing me, he said, "This man's the oldest hand aboard the brig, and kind of actin' captain like. There's no boss but him. It's been a bad job for 'em all. But he'll tell you the story, sir, with your leave, while me and the others gets something to eat."

I gave the seaman my hand, saying, "I don't know what your story may be, but by bringing this brig here you're delivering us from a frightful position, as you may guess it to be if you cast your eye around you; and we are thankful to Almighty God that you have come."

And so saying, I shook him heartily by the hand, and was followed in that business by Aunt Damaris and Florence, whose thanks and tearful voices seemed to cast what mind he had brought with him altogether adrift, and all he could do was to work away at his Scotch cap and mutter something about its being a stroke of luck both ways,

"not one's more'n another's," and eye me dully. I knew this man, by a glance at him, to be of a class of seamen who cannot talk without being questioned, so forthwith I began—

"What's your name, my man, so that I may know how to converse with you?"

"William Somers, sir," he replied.

"I suppose the bo'sun has told you our story?"

"Yes, sir. You're a portion of the crew and passengers of the *Strathmore*, lost in a collision three nights ago, and was landed here yesterday marning."

"Ay; and what brig is that?"

"The *Sarah Jane*, sir; in ballast, bound from the Cape o' Good Hope to Wellington, New Zealand, from which port she sailed for Table Bay with a cargo of timber. Three weeks ago we was drove low south by a hurricane from the nor'-east. We hove to under bare poles, and drifted like a balloon, sir. Same night o' the gale a sea broke over the wessel, and washed the cap'n overboard, and he was drowned. It likewise broke the leg of a man by flinging him agin' the lee bulwarks. It washed another man aft, and injured him hinternally. Them two have been disabled ever since. There was a man ill at the time with some kind o' fever; he took worse arter the gale had blowed itself out, and died, and we buried him. Then last week the mate—he's an

only mate,* sir,—who'd been ailing for some time, had to keep his bunk. He's been too ill to navigate the brig, and I fear his time's nearly up, for there's no medicine aboard the wessel, and he don't seem to know what his complaint is."

"How many men are there to work the brig?"

He fell to counting on his fingers: "There war seven of a crew, hexcludin' the cap'n and mate. Two ill and one gone leaves four; one of 'em, the cook, who's no good aloft, and another, a boy."

"Are you capable of navigating the vessel?"

"No, sir."

"Then how did you make your way here?"

"Why, the mate gave me the course, and we steered and took our chance."

"But what made you head for this island?"

"The mate hoped we might find help. He'd heard of wessels callin' here, and trusted to get physic to do him good, likewise a couple of hands to assist in working the brig, and some one willin' to carry her to where she belongs—Wellington, New Zealand. He said there was no land nearer for hundreds and hundreds of miles. We've spoke only one wessel in five weeks—that were six days ago. She offered to take us off and turn the brig adrift, but I wur agin' that, and so was the mate, and she left us—in a rare hurry, it looked to me—as if she wur opposed to our considerin' her offer too long."

* That is, a man who holds an Only Mate's certificate.

“ You’ve lost your fore topgallant mast, I see.”

“ She jumped it out of her in the storm, sir. Our two boats was smashed into staves. But that was all the injury. We lost no sails.”

The men, sitting munching biscuit and preserved meat on the ground, listened eagerly. I glanced from them to Florence, who was looking with pity at the rough seaman, and then said to him—

“ Yours has been a hard case, Somers: not harder than ours, but hard enough for all that. But, God be praised, we’re both in luck. Here are hands enough to work that little hooker round the world; and in me, my lad, you behold an old fist at the sextant. But isn’t it a wonderful thing to come about? Oh, Shilling,” I cried, “ it’s more like a dream than the reality to see her there!” —pointing to the brig.

“ I felt it, Mr. Seymour, I felt it, sir,” he exclaimed, first swallowing a mouthful of biscuit, “ as I climbed over her side. Had the laniards I grasped dissolved in my hands, and the brig faded out like a vision, I shouldn’t have been surprised. The wonder was to see her and to find her a real thing, something to stand upon and lean against.”

“ And likewise may I say,” exclaimed Somers, addressing Shilling and the others, “ that when daylight come, and I see ye all standin’ here hailin’ and hollerin’, it pretty nigh took my breath away.

I says to one of my mates, 'Tom,' I says, 'why, there must be a willage or town astern o' them rocks, and them there are the inhabitants.' 'A town in your eye, William,' says he: 'if them men are not castaways I'll swaller my fingers.' He wur right," continued the man, gazing round at the towering slopes with the dull motion of an old seaman, and then staring with a kind of amazement at the hut up past us. "But, Lord! what should we have done if ye *hadn't* been here? Physic! There's ne'er a drop to be had in this place, I should think; and as to ships callin', I don't see what they have to come for. What's there to eat? That soup an' bully," said he, looking at the few remaining tins on the ground, "and that there bread came from your ship, I suppose?"

"Ay," responded one of the men; "there are no shops here, mate."

"There's plenty o' bilin' water, but nothen' to cook," cried another.

"Why should wessels call?" continued Somers. "Why, I never see such a hole of a island! The mate must have been wanderin' in his mind when he talked of gettin' help *here*."

"Dunno about that," said the bo'sun. "If that's what you call wanderin', it's the best stroke of sense he could ha' committed, both for us and for him."

"Won't you sit down," said I, "and eat something?"

"No," answered Somers, "thanking ye all the same. There'll be some breakfast ready when I gets aboard."

"How is the brig off for provisions?" said I.

"Pretty middling, I think," he answered. "But the cook'll be able to tell you what there is, sir."

"Well, anyway, we can fill up with fresh water," I observed; "and if there's such a thing as a gun aboard, we might lay in a stock of goat's meat."

"I believe ye'll find an old fowling-piece in the capt'n's cabin," exclaimed the man: "but I can't answer for powder. The boy'll know. But are there any goats here?" he added, rolling his eyes over the slopes; and then he muttered: "Shivered if ever I see sitch a hole. *Here's* a place to come for physic!"

It was quite likely that this man had imagined St. Paul's to be an inhabited island; and at any other time I should have laughed at the face he put on as he turned his eyes up and down the slopes and round upon the margin of the lake, and then upon the hut, coming back to us with a dull stare of bewilderment. But the minutes were precious, as long before the hour of sunset I hoped to have put that lonely, inhospitable rock far astern; so, addressing Shilling, I said: "Two of the men had better go to the hut and bring away the rest of the

provisions there; two of the others can jump into the gig and row the ladies and me aboard. You had best stop here, bo'sun, whilst I see if there's any ammunition for the fowling-piece Somers speaks of. There'll be nine of us without the brig's crew, remember, and if you and the others can knock over a goat or two, the meat will not come amiss. I'll send you the gun if there are balls and powder to be found. I'll also find out what fresh water there is aboard: it'll be a troublesome job to fill up from the slopes yonder, but it must be done. What think you of the weather?"

"Why, it looks as if it's goin' to be fine for ever," he replied, gazing up at the sky.

I told two of the men to jump into the boat, and handed Aunt Damaris and Florence into the stern-sheets. William Somers stowed himself away in the bows. The provisions which had been brought from the hut for breakfast—that is to say, as much as the nine of us had left of them—were passed to us, and we then shoved off, leaving the bo'sun and three sailors behind. I looked at Florence as we pulled through the breakwater and saw the towering cliffs of the island opening north and south, whilst the sound of the surf came along in a clear low thunder, heard *here* as it was not to be noticed from the inside of the great hollow, and for the life of me I could not help letting go one of the yoke-lines to grasp and press her hand. A radiant

expression came into her face as she whispered, "Jack, we shall see dear old Clifton and home again, after all!"

"And afterwards, darling?" I asked her.

But if she had any answer to make to this, Aunt Damaris took it out of her mouth by crying with her eyes fixed on the brig: "What a tall short ship! quite a tub, I declare! will she be safe in a high sea, Mr. Seymour, do you think?"

"Ay, as safe as the *Strathmore*," I replied.

"She ain't much of a hand at ratching, mum," sung out William Somers from the bows; "there's naught but sagging on a bowline in such a trim as hers; but as to being *safe*, ye should ha' seen the gale she carried us through. Never heerd of anything livelier; she'd ha' danced the fattest Dutchman as ever said 'yaw' for 'yes' out of his hammock, ay, even if he'd been lashed in it with the deep-sea lead atop of him to keep him down—true as I sit here, mum."

I looked for a gleam of mirth in him, but the man was as grave as an owl, and clearly meant what he said, seeing nothing uncommon in his manner of expressing himself. There were three heads over the brig's side watching us. The loneliness of the appearance of the old craft with her square up-and-down stern, her tall rusty black sides, round bows, and timbers scarred with toil, her slack grey rigging and ill-stayed spars affected me

with feelings that I am sure a fine large taut handsome craft would not have produced. Strong were the fancies of home she raised; you thought of the Thames as you looked at her, of the Tyne, of the Channel aswarm with just such vessels as she—Geordies deep with coal, and the white cliffs of the south-eastern coast dim between their masts: timber-craft from Norway, stealthily creeping athwart the North Sea, under the pulling of their patched boom-foresails—and, though, to be sure, she did not belong to England, yet she raised up a vivid picture of home before my mind's eye as common humble things often will, when grander shows wholly fail as inspirations; and she moved me to the heart when I looked past her to the blue gleaming distance and back at the island, and thought of the mighty scene we little company of human souls were in the centre of, and how that ugly tall squab old waggon there that made you think of wharves, and grimy faces, had been steered, as it might be, by the very hand of God through all these enormous leagues of water to our help. Ay! there was a light upon her that came not from the sea or sky: beautiful it made her ugliness, and you felt the power of gratitude to render an inanimate fabric of wood and hemp, as dear to the soul as if life were in it; and you loved it because of its love and labour for you.

We got the gig under her port main-channels, which formed a convenient platform for the ladies, and by dint of lifting and hoisting, we handed Florence and her aunt over the side. The three fellows who had watched us coming pressed eagerly around us. Their faces were full of astonishment; had we been wildly-attired savages, such as had never been viewed in any part of the world before by mariners, their looks could not have expressed more amazement that came very near indeed to an expression of incredulity. I at once asked which of them was the cook: whereupon the grimiest of the three striking himself, answered, "Here, sir."

"William Somers," said I, "tells me that your late captain had a fowling-piece—do you know if there's any ammunition on board?"

"You ought to be able to tell the gen'man, Dick," exclaimed the cook, turning to one of the three, who was a youth of about sixteen.

"A' knaw there's a goon," responded the boy, "but a' can't say if there's any pooder; I'll gan seek some."

"Had away, then," cried the cook, and the boy ran into the cabin.

This was a deck-house, extending abaft the main-mast. I could pretty well guess the *Sarah Jane's* age from the vestiges which remained of what had once been a gaudy front to this structure, even now not innocent of gilt, with little windows on either

side a low door, like a small cottage, a red curtain in each window, and some queer devices, painted green, forming a sort of frame for the quaint Dutch-like exterior. Past this deck-house on either hand went a narrow gangway, but from it to the house forward, where the men slept, was all clear deck, with a big main-hatch, a little winch, and a couple of old brake-pumps. Such a tub of a ship as this I had never before stood upon ; I doubt if her length was more than three and a half times her beam ; she had bulwarks as high as my shoulder ; there was scarcely a piece of timber belonging to her that did not resemble the inside of a muffin, with the holes of decay and hard usage in it ; and it would have made any sailor laugh to look aloft at the yards and spars which appeared to have belonged to vessels of different burden in their time. Nevertheless, when I felt that old deck under me, and saw the lonely island beyond lifting its great slopes into the sky, and then thought of what might have been the fate of the girl who stood near me glancing from here to there at the brig but for the miracle of this old hooker's arrival, my heart swelled with gratitude, and not the proudest line-of-battle-ship that ever reared her majestic heights of canvas to the clouds could, at a time when all was well with me, have seemed so fair and noble an object in my sight as did this decayed apple-bowed timber-box in the morning

of our release from a period of bitter suffering and of fears deeper than despair.

In a few minutes the boy returned with an old fowling-piece, a flask of powder, and some balls. He had found the ammunition in a locker in the captain's berth, he told us in a voice of triumph that sounded shrill with its North-Country rattle.

"I suppose you have no fresh meat aboard?" said I to the cook.

"Not an ounce, sir."

"Is there plenty of salt meat?" He answered, so much pork and so much beef, as near as he could guess, without overhauling the stores. "Then," said I, "it's plain enough we must lay in a stock of goat's flesh. What fresh water is there?"

Of this fortunately there was an abundance, a number of spare casks having been taken aboard at the Cape, and filled to serve as ballast. This, as I say, was most fortunate, for the labour of obtaining a store from the wells up the hills would have been enormous, and must have detained us three or four days. I now told the boy and the other seaman that they could jump into the gig with the fowling-piece, and go ashore and help my men to kill as many goats as they could come at, and hunt for crabs and shell-fish, and whatever provisions the rocks yielded. The poor fellows were delighted with the chance of a run ashore and tumbled

briskly over the side. The cook looked as if he would like to join them, but I wished to have him aboard to tell me about the rest of the stores, etc., and to get the cabin to rights for the ladies. Will Somers also remained, and I asked him to step into the cabin where the mate lay, and ascertain how he was, and if he could speak with me. He returned after a short absence, and said that the mate was very poorly indeed, but that he'd be glad if I'd see him. "The first question he asked," said Somers, "was, if there's any chance of gettin' some medicine for his sickness; and when I shook my head and told him I was afeard there was nothen to be done in that way in this mucking ileyand, his jaw dropped, and 'twas pitiful to hear the groan he gave."

The three of us followed the man into the deck-house, which I found to be a very plain old interior quite in keeping with the rest of the brig. There was a table on the starboard side, with a cushioned locker running down it, and on the port side there went a bulkhead divided into three cabins, with a bit of a berth in the foremost end where, I afterwards learnt, were kept the sailmaker's gear, carpenter's chest, stuff used for the rigging, etc. It was a homely cabin, indeed, a mere box of a place, with the carvings and jobbings of three or four generations of sailors upon the woodwork of it, four small circular windows over the table, and a

little window in each cabin. If there had ever been a carpet it must have gone overboard during the gale. I asked Florence and her aunt to be seated whilst I spoke to the mate ; and on Somers indicating the man's cabin, which was the aftermost one, I knocked on the little door and entered.

A gleam of sunshine came through the window, and slanted like a bar of silver from it to the deck ; it filled the narrow compartment with a luminous haze that made seeing difficult for a moment or two, and then behind the sunbeam, as it might be, I made out a bunk with a man lying in it, dressed in his drawers and shirt, with an old blanket drawn over his bare feet up to his knees.

There was a seaman's chest painted green, in one corner, and on top of it a tin dish containing a piece of salt meat that looked to have been untasted. A broken clay pipe lay on the deck under the bunk. An old rusty pilot coat swung by a nail at the door, and near the chest was an empty metal washbasin. The poor fellow lying in the bunk was a man of about thirty years of age ; yet he might have passed for fifty, so fearful was the havoc that pain and sickness had wrought in his face. His hair lay plentifully tossed upon the rude soiled bolster that pillowed his head : his eyes had the glazed look that incessant anguish gives ; his lips were bloodless, and so fiercely had emaciation done its work, that under the ragged beard, the

growth of a few weeks only, it looked to be, you could see the jawbone coming through the skin like the back of a knife, and every vein and artery upon the forehead and under the eyes and down past the ears on either side the throat stood out as standing rigging will under a wet sail blown hard against it.

"I am sorry," said I, approaching him close and speaking softly, "to find you in this state; and sorrier seeing that it is to you, under God, that there are nine of us, of whom two are ladies, who will be owing their preservation from heaven alone knows what fearful fate. What is your malady?"

"I don't know, sir," he answered, in such a voice that it made the heart sick to hear it, "I'd been ailing ever since we left the Cape, but it came on worse after the captain was washed overboard, and has made me what you see. I'm sure medicine could save me; I'm sure a doctor could make me a well man. Oh, it's a dreadful thing to lie dying here alone—without help—so far from home. I'd not mind death if I could be buried ashore, but to think of being flung into the sea and left to float about there—oh, God, have mercy upon me!"

"You mustn't think of *that*," said I. "You're a sailor, and have held your life in your hand too long, as all sailor men do, to give up whilst you've still got a grip of it. I've left my men

ashore to kill some goats if they can come at them, and a mess of fresh meat should do you good," said I, with a glance at the pale bit of salt meat in the tin; "and when they have done that job, which needn't take them over long, we'll up anchor and head for the latitude of ships, where we may get advice and medicine for you."

He muttered something with a rolling up of his eyes that left nothing but the whites of them visible, and methought, when I looked at him *then*, lads, that if ever death, lying skulking inside of a live man, and quietly doing its work there, came up and had a peep at you out of his face, it did out of that mate's, and God help me for the wild memory of it. Presently his eyes came back to their place, and he gazed at me sensibly.

"Is there any one of you," says he, "who can navigate this brig?"

"I can," I replied; "that is, if you have the means aboard."

"Oh, you'll find what you want in the captain's cabin, sir," he exclaimed; "but I fear the chronometer 'll have stopped."

"Then I must make shift and do without it," said I. "I am glad to hear there is plenty of fresh water aboard. Do you know what stock of provisions remains?"

"How many will there be of us altogether, sir?"

“Well, our party makes nine; and there are seven of you, counting the two disabled men and yourself—sixteen in all.”

He shut his eyes, and lay awhile thinking; and the brightness coming down white off the gush of sunshine piercing the cabin window, lay full upon his face, and made him look the saddest corpse—for never did man seem deader as he lay with his eyes shut—that was ever floated by a ship’s deck.

“I think,” said he, faintly, “you’ll find there’ll be enough provisions to last out five weeks, by putting all hands on short allowance.”

“Not more?”

“I fancy not, sir. But the cook can overhaul the lazarette and let you know.”

If this were true, it was not comforting, though I will not say it was alarming either, for so long as we had plenty of fresh water, the hardship of going upon a short allowance of provisions would not be very great; and it would be more than strange, indeed it would seem as if we were to be cursed and finally overwhelmed and destroyed by misfortune, if, between this and five weeks, we did not encounter help. After a short pause, the mate asked me how I proposed to head.

“Why,” said I, “for Australia. I don’t see that we could do better. We have nothing but westerly winds in these seas to depend upon.”

A sort of light came into his dim eyes, and a wan smile played about his mouth. "Oh," said he, "it does me good to talk to you, sir, and hear you speak of heading for Australia. There's a sound of life in your words, sir. I wish I was able to be on deck to help you. But you'll find William Somers a good steady man; you can safely trust him with the brig."

"Ay," said I, "and besides, I have the bo'sun of the *Strathmore*—a first-rate seaman. Don't trouble yourself about your inability to help me: I'm an old hand, and think I can show the *Sarah Jane* the road home. Meanwhile, pluck up heart, and hope for the best, and depend upon it, that if help can be obtained, the first of it shall be given to you." And so saying, I took his hand, and pressed it, and left him.

CHAPTER XII.

WE LEAVE THE ISLAND.

I FOUND the cook standing in the cabin door, and called him in to help me to arrange for the accommodation of Aunt Damaris and Florence. The largest of the three cabins was the captain's, next the mate's; there were two bunks in this room, along with a fixed washstand, a little table that swung on hinges, and one or two other things of that kind, which made the compartment look habitable.

“Now, Mr. Seymour,” exclaimed Aunt Damaris, throwing down her cloak, and looking and talking with a great air of hearty active bustle, “I’m not going to allow you to be our chambermaid. You have the brig and the provisions and a thousand matters to attend to, and Florence and I are quite able to make this cabin comfortable for ourselves. Have you any clean blankets in this ship?” said she, addressing the cook, with the old pecking gesture of her lean face.

"Naught but what you see, missus," answered the cook, pointing to a blanket and rug in the upper bunk.

"Well, we cannot use them as they are, but I suppose they can be washed and dried by-and-by," said the old lady, hauling them out, and looking at them, and then dropping them on to the deck.

"I'll endeavour to wash them, if the cook can find me a tub and some soap," said Florence.

I laughed, and said, "Why, my darling, what do you think you could make of them with your little hands? No need for you to turn laundress yet, Florence. Besides, I suppose there's not much soap to be found going aboard the *Sarah Jane*, is there, cook?"

"I dunno as I could put my hand at once on a piece," answered the cook; "but there ought to be a bar or two knocking about somewheres."

"Any way, Miss Hawke," said I, "I'll leave you for the present, whilst I take a look round. This cabin is not so comfortable as the *Strathmore's*, but it's better than the hut," and so saying, I left them, keeping silence about the desperate condition of the mate next door, for *they* could do him no good, and I wanted nothing sorrowful to come down again with its gloom to darken the hope and gladness which were shining bright in my darling's beauty.

The little hatch that led into the lazarette, was

at the extreme after end of the deck-house, and I told the cook to get a light and go down and make out a list of the provisions there, that we might thoroughly understand how we were off in that respect. Whilst he was thus occupied, I went on deck, and walked forward to the fore deck-house, the crew's sleeping place, a long structure with a little bit of a caboose at one end of it; and, putting my head in, I found a row of hammocks suspended from the ceiling, with several chests on the deck, on one of which sat William Somers smoking a pipe.

“Where are the disabled men?” I asked.

He pointed to a couple of the hammocks which were swung forwards, and I went and stood up betwixt them. My eyes came just above the canvas sides, and I saw the men, one on either hand, lying motionless and white. I spoke to them, and they answered me. I told them who I was, and gave them a brief account of our shipwreck, and asked them how they were getting on. The fellow who had broken his leg said that the limb gave him no pain; he was afraid he'd never be able to go to sea any more, and how he was to get a living he was sure he couldn't tell; anyhow, he didn't think now he was going to die, though when he was first laid down after he had broken his leg, the pain was so fearful that he had made sure his time was come. The other man was in

a worse plight: he had injured himself internally, and the least movement of his body gave him great agony. I did my utmost to encourage them both by giving them to understand that my own men consisted of seven able seamen, that I had been second mate in my time, and that amongst us it would go hard if we did not haul the brig and them and the poor mate aft, clear of the dreadful mess we had found them in, and put them in the way of becoming sound men again. I saw a kind of life come glimmering into their faces, which, now that my sight was used to the twilight in which they hung, were quite visible, as they listened to me. But, my lads, it was sad to see them, sad to a man whose heart is with sailors, who knows their hard life, the nameless deaths they die, and how they encounter sufferings, how they endure anguish, which God alone, whose eye is upon the sea, where the most helpless and the most simple-hearted of His children are gathered, has any knowledge of. Heaven forbid that I should claim from humanity more sympathy for the sailor than for any other class whose life is obscure, whose toil is great, whose poverty is extreme, whose sufferings are many, whose death is often violent. But the sick or dying seaman, far away out at sea, in the lonely fore-castle, the lonely hammock, so friendless, that when he is dropped over the ship's side no man can say

whose child he was, lying there with the sound of the storm, or the wash of the bow-wave in his ear, a poor, ignorant, simple, harmless human soul, floating, as it might be, out of the immensity of the ocean into eternity, with never a woman's sob to let him know that he is loved, with never a tender hand to smooth his pillow, to refresh his forehead, to let him feel that there is a heart that cares for him, appeals to one so strongly, that I cannot conceive of any other form of sickness or death more moving. Mates, it may be so because of the vastness and loneliness of the deep. *This*, one feels as a condition of death at sea, that makes a soul's departure to its God an awful, a subduing thing there. Ashore you have green fields, and trees and houses to limit your sphere, and a graveyard to localize your loss. But at sea, you look athwart the slant of the distant blue swell right into the azure eternity; and the sense of immeasurable space, and the frightful loneliness of it, is upon you as you witness the launch of a soul by death into it just as the mystery of the fathomless ocean with its dark heart and the wonders contained in it, seems to rise like a breathing out of its unbroken circle as the sailor's corpse cleaves it, and a bubble sparkles for an instant as Nature's memorial of another vanished life.

"It'll be a tight fit," said I to Somers, "for my

six men and you who remain of the crew in this deck-house."

"Ay, it'll be tight," he answered; "but there'll be only half of us here at a time; and if this weather lasts I dunno that it could harm the most delikit among us to turn in on deck. There's room for three or four men under the windlass."

"Oh, you'll manage, no doubt. D'ye know if the galley fire's alight?"

"It is, sir."

"Then, my lad," said I, "I'd take it as a kindness if you'd turn to and boil a pot of coffee for the ladies and me. The cook's busy in the lazarette, or I shouldn't trouble you. We've not drunk anything warm in that way since the night our ship went down."

He at once complied, whilst I stumped about the deck, examining the brig's equipment and her rigging and spars. I discovered that we should have to sail the vessel without a foretopgallant mast, for there were no spare booms, nothing that would answer for a mast and yard, to be seen. But this was no very serious matter. The weather continued beautifully fine. The brig rolled lightly upon the faint swell that, as it ran, seemed to deepen the wonderful blue of the ocean with its folds. The vault of the sky was cloudless, and the sun flashed in the north-east; the light of him made the heavens like silver all about him; but the

island slopes went up into violet so darkly pure that the rich bewildering loveliness of it cannot be expressed nor imagined. From the brig, one saw the eastern and part of the northern seaboard of that lonesome hollow rock, and I stood lost in thought watching it. Inland, beyond the lake, the curve of it went round with a faintness of colour, and the gleam of water under it. I could see two of the men upon the rocks a long way past the spot whereon we had landed, but the others were not in sight. On the summit on the right was the boat's mast with Aunt Damaris' shawl fluttering its black folds upon the soft wind that had veered into the west, and was blowing without weight enough to swing the brig. A tiny signal it looked, and a hopeless one I felt it must have proved, had we had nothing else to look for but the help it was likely to court. The surf made a continuous moan, and in places at the base of the rocks it would flash out at times, and there was a frequent play of it around the ninepin rock, that was a towering lump to look at from our anchorage.

Thus gazing in a dreamy manner, scarcely realizing the ill-luck that had plunged us into this situation, the amazing good fortune that had rescued us from it, I was aroused by feeling a hand slipped into mine. It was Florence.

"Oh, Jack!" she exclaimed, "is it not wonderful to find ourselves *here* when yesterday we

believed we should never be released from that island ? ”

“ So wonderful that it hardly seems true. Why, only think of the chances against a vessel calling here for any purpose ! But the sea is too full of surprises to allow people who are accustomed to it ever to feel astonished at what happens on it. The night we spent in an open boat : one day and night on that rock : that consists of our shipwreck so far. Now our business is not to go on wondering, but to get home. And oh, my love, my darling, how happy shall I be when I feel that English soil is once again under your feet, and that there is no more fear of sea disasters happening to make your sweet face white, and put such sorrow and hopelessness as I spied yesterday in your eyes.”

“ It has been a terrible time—yet it has done one thing, Jack—I think.”

“ What, my own ? ”

“ It has brought us closer together,” said she, hanging her head and yet peeping at me.

“ Ay, it has done that. But what is to be the end ? When we get home what will your father do ? will he come between us ? ”

“ I don't think he will—I don't think he could,” she answered, and then said, “ poor papa ! ” and sighed.

I folded my arms and leaned against the bul-

warks looking at her. "I talk of getting home," said I; "but we have to reach Australia first."

"Oh! are we going on to Australia?"

"Why, yes; because, you see, the prevailing winds in these seas are westerly, and I don't want to sail a thousand miles north to get a fair wind for the Cape. When we reach Australia, arrangements may be made for you to stop with your aunt a year or two, and what shall I do then? must I stay too? if I am ever to call you my own, inseparably mine, Florence—my wife indeed—how long shall I have to wait for that time to arrive? Oh, my darling, do you know that my outlook as regards *you* is like our outlook from that island yesterday: nothing but fine weather in sight; no land, no ship, no promise of escape?"

She was blushing as I talked thus: but girls have mighty good sense in such matters as these, and she quietly took a hitch with the end of my jawing-tackle by saying, "Jack, let us reach Australia first, and then, dear, we will put our heads together," which properly brought me up with a round turn; for, after all, there was no good jabbering about how we were to get married, and what her father would do, and what might happen when we reached Sydney or England, or whatever other country we might happen to fetch, till the island we were lying abreast of was as far astern as the coast we meant to aim for was now distant.

Besides, Aunt Damaris at that moment came out of the cabin to stop any further talk of that kind. You could see the high spirits she was in by her walk, that was half a dance, as she approached us.

“Oh!” she cried, in a rapturous way, clasping her hands, with many a pecking gesture of her head; “what a wonderful deliverance! It is impossible to realize it in that house. Our cabin will do very well, Mr. Seymour. Florence will take the top berth, for I cannot climb. If one of the sailors will wash the rug and blanket—and I dare say there are more to be had and washed—we shall be quite comfortable. How long are we going to stop here?”

“I am only waiting for the men to come off with whatever they may catch or kill,” said I.

“And where shall we go *then*?” she asked.

“Why, to Australia,” I replied.

“Oh, pray don’t go to Australia, for *my* sake, if there’s any nearer land. The nearest place where we can find a comfortable ship will be the best place to sail to.”

I told her that Australia was as near as any other country, and I also explained why I chose it. “But,” said I, “I don’t trouble to think of fetching Australia in this old waggon. We must endeavour to sight a vessel and transfer ourselves to her, let her destination be what it will.”

“Suppose,” said she, “we don’t sight a ship;

will you be able to navigate this brig to Australia ? ”

“ Why, yes ; certainly. If I were not a sailor I should no doubt be at a loss. You see, Miss Hawke, it’s sometimes useful to have been at sea as a sailor.”

“ And to be in the company of a sailor when one is shipwrecked,” said Florence.

“ Oh, Mr. Jack,” cried Aunt Damaris, effusively, grasping my hand ; “ you are a dear good fellow ! What do we not owe you ? ”

“ *This*,” I replied, lifting Florence’s hand.

“ You have it,” answered the old lady, promptly. “ Have I not told you so again and again ? It is *my* affair now,” she added, with a toss of her head for which I could have kissed her ; “ and my brother will see the thing in its proper light when *I* explain.”

My darling’s sweet eyes peered up into mine as if she should say, “ There, Jack, what more can you possibly want ? ”

Just then comes William Somers, rolling out of the galley with a couple of hookpots of coffee in his hands. We followed him into the cabin, and, by dint of rummaging, he procured some cups and saucers, ship’s biscuit, moist sugar, and a lump of cold salt junk. There was no milk, but, for all that, Florence and her aunt were glad of the hot coffee ; and they even attacked the beef and the

sea bread, finding their appetite now that the first deep excitement the news and sight of the brig had raised in them was gone, and perhaps guessing there might be some relish in the salt meat after the fat and insipid tinned stuff we had been living upon. It did my heart good to see them eating and talking in that little cabin with something of the old life in their manner that they had aboard the *Strathmore*. Whilst we were thus occupied, the cook came up out of the lazarette, rather scaring Florence by his slow ghostly way of issuing through the bit of a hatch. He was covered with perspiration and grimy as a sweep with creeping and crawling; but the job was worth the trouble, for, from the report he made to me, and the figures he had set down on a piece of paper by the aid of his lamp, I could now tell exactly the length of time the provisions would hold out by putting ourselves on a limited allowance. I found that we could make them last a good two months without very great stint. This was beyond my expectations, and rendered me easy in my mind; for I had a good right to consider that even if we failed to encounter between this and Australia any vessel worth quitting the brig for, we were likely to meet with one that would be willing to help us to the extent of a gift of beef, or flour, or bread.

There was nothing now to be done till the men

came aboard ; and I hoped the bo'sun, if he found the old fowling-piece of no use among the goats, would not linger, for I was impatient and wanted to be off. The westerly wind had gathered weight, and was now blowing a very pretty little breeze. The sea sparkled like a surface of diamonds to it, and the blue shone up through the innumerable flashing, and made a most lovely space of water. I could not see the men ashore, nor hear the sound of shots ; but there was nothing surprising in this, for the north horn of rock shut out a large piece of the island in the north-west, and for the same cause the sound of the gun, if the crazy old piece made any noise at all, would be killed long before it could reach us. I got chairs out of the cabin, and made my darling and the old lady comfortable on deck ; and hung about them all the morning till the sun was past the north and the afternoon had begun.

Talk ! why, I cannot remember that my tongue ever wagged more incessantly. One thing leading on to another, we drifted into the subject of my love, and I gave Aunt Damaris the whole story of it as if this were the first time this matter had been mentioned between us. I wouldn't let her off a single point. I began the yarn by telling her all about myself, who my father was, and who my mother was, the exact extent of my income, how my uncle had found me out, and so worked my way

clean along until I came to my joining the *Strathmore*, and then I bestowed a few blunt truths upon her. I told her that I had chosen the name of Egerton, "because," said I, "it has an aristocratic sound, and I hoped it might prejudice you in my favour and enable me to be much with Florence without——"

"Without what, Mr. Seymour?" said she with her old face looking wonderfully keen against the blue sky beyond her.

"Well, without exciting your hostility. I thought to myself, 'if she likes Mr. Morecombe simply because he's well connected, she will like me, too, if I can only make her believe I'm of good birth and aristocratically associated.' But I didn't succeed," said I smiling at her; "if you liked me it was for myself."

"You shouldn't have tried," she answered; "it's the one thing I can't respect in you. It's annoying to be imposed upon."

"Yes," said I, "but supposing I had come aboard as Jack Seymour, and you had known who I was, what would have happened? You'd have taken my darling ashore again, and gone back to Clifton to tell Mr. Hawke that that horrid vulgar young sailor fellow had actually had the impudence——"

"Oh, Jack, please don't," cried Florence.

"And besides," I continued, "you'd never have

known me, and I'd have had no chance of proving to you that I was not such a what-you-may-call-it as Mr. Hawke had led you to believe."

"You mentioned the name of Mr. Morecombe just now," said the old lady. "Haven't I begged you not to refer to that man? If not for mine, then for Florence's sake. It's positively indelicate, I think, to speak of him. And oh! what a place to be talking about these matters in!" she cried with a look around at the brig and then a sharp glance at the island. "Why *have* you begun the subject? Are you not satisfied? You have won my niece's love, you have gained my consent, and, after what has happened, her papa is not likely to object. You had no right to impose upon me—and Florence, you are equally guilty—but I have forgiven you *that*, Mr. Jack, in consideration of the manner in which you have behaved since that fearful night when the *Strathmore* was wrecked."

I bowed and said, "I only desire to clear myself. You know very little about me, and I wished you to learn all that I had it in my power to tell. As to Florence, she would have confessed who I was to you on the very day she discovered I was on board. If she kept my secret it was for my sake, not for her own."

"Besides, aunt," said Florence, "do not forget that I, too, was imposed upon by being urged to take this dreadful voyage without the least hint

having been given me that Mr. Morecombe was to join us. You know that had I dreamt he was coming with us I should not have put foot on the *Strathmore*."

"Bother the man!" cried the old lady. "I wish he had never been born, I'm sure."

"It's a pity he didn't persevere in his pursuit of Florence," said I. "I should like to have had him with us in the gig and on that island. Oh, Miss Hawke, he was an arrant impostor—a consummate ass. Think of consigning my darling to a bit of gingerbread that was to get its gilding from her!"

"Won't you change the subject?" exclaimed the old lady.

"I will," I replied; "but if you put a gimlet into a full cask it'll leak; and the thought of that puppy works into my heart like a bradawl."

"It's dreadful," said Aunt Damaris, "to be talking of such light subjects here. Why don't you speak to me of the other boats? where are they? what has become of them? are all the people in them drowned? Oh, think of poor Mrs. and Miss Grant, and the 'tween deck women and their little children and babies!"

"Their disappearance is a complete puzzle to me," said I. "Pray God they may be accounted for. I propose to steer for Amsterdam island when we get under weigh. Some of the boats may have

fetched that place. I wish our men would come. This is not a breeze to waste."

As I said this, I turned to look over the rail towards the island, and the first thing I saw was the gig pulling out through the breakwater. "Here they are!" I shouted. "Goats or no goats; hurrah for home!"

The boat was deep, much deeper than the weight of the seven men should have sunk her. The oars flashed in the sunshine as they rose and fell, and I sprang on to the bulwarks to hail the bo'sun. "Bear a hand, men," I bawled. "Let's get under weigh. We're sick of waiting. What have you got?"

"Four dead goats and about half a ton of crabs and shell-fish," he shouted.

The gig drove alongside, and it was indeed a sight to look into her. Crawling and wriggling about her bottom were some hundreds of crabs, many of them of great size, together with masses of shell-fish of various descriptions, such as crayfish, whelks, or what might have passed for them, limpets, and cockles. Upon them lay four dead goats, meagre-looking animals to be sure, with long beards and long horns. The men came clambering over the brig's side, leaving two hands in the gig; then the goats were hauled up, all the tubs which could be mustered brought along, and buckets passed over, which were filled with crabs

and shell-fish, drawn up and emptied into the tubs. There looked, perhaps, to be more than there was ; but, nevertheless, there was a wonderful store, and I asked the bo'sun how on earth the men had managed to collect so great a quantity. He told me that he had put four men to the work whilst he and two others went a goat-hunting. In one part of the rocky beach there were grooves and hollows full of crabs and cray-fish, and many of the rocks were thick with limpets and cockles. The men stripped off their shirts to form bags, and in that manner carried quantities to the boat, "which," said the bo'sun, "I found half full of crabs and cockles when I and my mates came down with the goats. Four was as many as I could knock over," he continued. "'Twas a rare job to get anigh 'em. They seemed to smell ye if you stirred, and with a toss of the head be off like a gale o' wind. I wasted all my powder upon them four. And the gun was a rare 'un to miss. An' I dunno'," said he, "after all's said and done, whether them beasts was worth the trouble o' chasing. I'll allow they're more hair nor meat, an' I reckon, when ye've chucked their horns and beards and tails and hoofs out o' the calculation, there'll not be much soup to come at, though we should turn to and go on biling from now till we get home."

"Did you bring off the rest of our old stores?"

"Ay, sir, all that there was."

I pulled out my watch. "It's now a quarter to two," said I. "Send the men to dinner, will you, Shilling; they'd better dine off the old stores to save time, and tell them not to be long over it. I want to be in sight of Amsterdam Island before dark, if possible, to see if there be any of the *Strathmore's* people there."

The gig was now emptied, the two fellows tumbled up out of her, she was then hoisted aboard, and all hands went to dinner. Pleasant it was to hear their gruff voices talking in the deck-house, and to see one and then another come out munching and looking up and around and then re-entering the structure. It made one feel the reality of the brig and the sureness of the rescue in a manner that one was scarcely sensible of when alone, and when the vessel was silent and the sound of the surf could be heard. Aunt Damaris and Florence went about the decks looking at the crabs, which offered a curious sight as they crawled and stirred in heaps in the tubs; but somehow, now that we were about to get under weigh, the sense of what we had come through, and what we had escaped, weighed upon me so heavily that I could think of nothing else, and stood as a man in a dream, with my eyes fixed on the island. I know that my soul fell into a prayer that was without words when I put myself back in fancy upon that rocky summit and imagined

the darkness round me, and the stars shining into the hollow, and my sight despairfully yearning into the distant dimness of the mighty sea, and then reflected upon what the morning had brought, and how here we were now aboard a vessel abundantly manned, and of bulk enough to transport us safely whithersoever we should take it into our heads to steer her. It seemed too wonderful a stroke of fortune to be real, and yet there was that lonely island, terrible for its solitude, to assure it. It set my heart off at a galop to see the sunshine flashing into the blue air of the cup, and the rugged slopes beyond going up dark against the glorious Pacific azure, and to think that, but for this brig, we might have languished there for weeks and months, till our clothes fell in rags from our bodies, till sickness and suffering had thinned our little company and left but two or three to look with dying eyes into each other's hollow face. A man feels a situation of horror like this more when he has just escaped from it than when he is actually in it. There is a curdling of the blood, a sickly sensation of fear in looking down the precipice over which you were just now hanging, holding your life by grasping a root, such as, maybe, you were not sensible of when a five hundred foot fall was below you, and the daylight was growing faint upon your eyes.

However, the sound of the bo'sun's voice called

me away from these thoughts. Florence and her aunt came aft; and in a few minutes all hands were on deck, and the windlass clanking handsomely as, bit by bit, the chain cable was hove in to a rattling chorus that awoke a hundred echoes in the island.

“Jump aloft, two of you,” I sung out, “and loose the topsails. Bo’sun, get the fore-topmast staysail hoisted. Loose the topgallantsail before you come down, and stand by to overhaul your clewlines!” I bawled to the fellow who was trotting up the main rigging. Clink, clink, went the windlass paul forward, and the voices of the men broke away in a hurricane note.

“Hove short, sir,” roared the bo’sun.

“Sheet home the fore-topsail, then. Hoist away the jib there,” and in a few minutes there was sail enough to pay the brig’s head off. Once again the windlass was manned, the anchor broken out of the ground, and with the helm hard over, the light old timber waggon slewed slowly round on her heel and began to move through the water.

“Loose the foresail. Masthead the maintopsail yard. Get your main and maintopmast staysails hoisted. Loose the trysail. Wheel there, steady! How’s her head?”

“North by east, half east, sir.”

“Keep her at that.”

It was all bustle and singing out and tumbling

about. But never, I dare say, from the hour on which she was launched had sail been made on the brig more rapidly. I'd notice old Aunt Damaris staring at me with wonder as I shouted out orders, whilst Florence, sitting alongside of her, would look at her with a smile. When all the canvas the brig carried was set, and she was leaning under the pleasant west wind that was right abeam, with the further reaches of the island opening out into the sunlight and the hollow contracting as the island receded, I sprang on to the rail and, with a wild flourish of my cap, cheered till it was a wonder I didn't crack my pipes. My example was instantly imitated by all hands, who, jumping into the rigging, and taking their time from the bo'sun, thundered out cheers, again and again repeated. You would have thought there were people on the island and that we were bidding them farewell. Florence waved her pocket-handkerchief, and I believe the old lady joined in our shouts. Bit by bit the lonely rock diminished in size, point after point fading into brown, and the great ninepin rock melting into the land. The huge blue ocean was before us, twinkling frostily under the play of the pleasant wind, and the old brig curtseying over the light head-swell was throwing enough foam off her weather bow to furnish out a wake to make her look to be sailing ten miles an hour.

CHAPTER XIII.

STRUGGLING EASTWARDS.

THE sun seemed to grow hotter as he westered, and the sky northwards took a deeper liquid tint; but gradually the breeze briskened until, at four o'clock, it was making a loud humming aloft with white clouds in the eye of it coming up large and full, snow-tinted in their brows, and prismatic colours like bits of rainbow in their skirts; their shadows gave a new life to the sea that was now running in narrow ridges of as beautiful a blue as the heavens, every azure summit flashing into foam. But I was more concerned with the brig, and with keeping a bright look-out for land ahead, than with thinking of the picture the ocean made, though I had eyes for a shower of flying-fish that sparked out to windward in a glittering flight, repeated half a score of times, and for a gleaming green body that might have passed for a huge wedge of emerald, and that I reckoned to be a dolphin, which kept pace with us to windward in

the wake of the timid lovely little prey it was chiveying.

There was a reel-log abaft the deck-house, and I had it hove, and made the speed a trifle less than six knots. This was better than I should have hoped from the bows and run of the old hooker; and yet the breeze now blowing would have sent the *Strathmore* ahead at ten miles an hour. The only sails the brig wanted were the fore-topgallant-sail and flying jib: for she carried no studding sails, her yards perhaps being thought square enough to enable her to do without them; yet with all her canvas as well set as hauling taut could bring it, the yards braced in, every cloth doing its work, the hull so light that it might have passed for a floating balloon, the water smooth and the head swell much too gentle to bother her, the *Sarah Jane* was barely giving us six knots. Well, thought I to myself, if we're not taken out of her by some passing ship, our voyage to Australia bids fair to be a long one, for if we can't do better than this under the most favourable conditions which could befall a vessel, what's to happen if we meet with head-winds or light baffling airs?

Three hours after we had quitted St. Paul's Island Amsterdam Island was in sight about a point on the lee-bow, a looming bit of blue with the running waters trembling between it and us. Fourteen or fifteen miles astern was the island we had left,

like a bit of amber in the western sunshine. We had a fair spell of daylight yet before us, and glad was I to feel the wind freshening still and the bluff bows forward bursting with a roaring noise through the water, for, long before the darkness fell, the breeze would have brought us well within the scope of any eyes that might be upon the land there, and it was not likely to draw up so black but that a boat could see and fetch us if we hove to and waited a-bit. All this while the hands had been full of business, making ready the deck-house for themselves, skinning and cutting up the goats into joints, boiling the crabs and shell-fish in cap-fulls to make room in the tubs for those which were left uncooked, cleaning up the decks, washing blankets (which had been come at by the cook) for cabin use. The bo'sun kept aft with me much of the time, and there was a hand in the fore-top with the brig's telescope, working away with it at the growing and brightening island, ready to report a signal or a boat if ever such a thing should heave into the view of his lenses.

A little before six, when the men were thinking of going to supper, I told the bo'sun we might as well divide them into watches there and then, and asked him to send them aft, as I wanted to say something to them. His hoarse voice sounded, and in two's and three's the crew came along to past the main-mast, and stood in a cluster fronting the cabin-door.

If troubles don't sweeten humanity, I can answer for it that they make fellow-feelings sharp, and find a warm heart for a man to think of his comrades in trouble with. I could not look at those seamen without a kind of longing to grasp every one's hand. Rough they were and grimy as the deuce, for, you see, they'd had no leisure yet for a wash-down, and what with hunting for crabs and shooting goats and clearing up the decks and so forth, their toil had been both dirty and hard ; and had you found them, as they then appeared, in a shipping-yard or cruising along an East-End street, you'd have backed out of their road and passed on, thinking them a pack of greasy rascals and wondering what on earth the British merchant sailor was coming to. But how well they had done their duty ! how uncomplainingly they had accepted the privations of shipwreck ! what heart they had maintained ! what spirits ! what an honest sense of discipline ! And could I forget how they had taken their rest in the cold damp night air upon the rocks of that iron island that Aunt Damaris and Florence might enjoy such poor privacy as the wretched hut had yielded them ? Oh, my lads, let us always think kindly of poor Jack. Rough and reckless he may be, with more faults than you have time or patience to count, but in my opinion he is never so bad but that there's more good in him than you will find in scores of men who are reckoned

really good ashore; and let shipowners and captains say what they like to the contrary, my belief is that there's no ship's fore-castle afloat that does not hold kinder hearts, warmer feelings, more generous natures, more manly and more unselfish qualities, ay, mixed up as they may be with curses and growlings God knows too often richly justified, than you'd find in the biggest building in Great Britain were you to choke it with landmen from the nobleman down to the chimney-sweep.

"My lads," said I, "I've asked you to step aft just to put a question to you. I've taken charge so far, because a head's wanted and we're bound to make a start. But I don't mean to be skipper here without your sanction. You men of the poor old *Strathmore* know who I am; what my qualifications as a sailor are the bo'sun told you in the gig. The others belonging to the *Sarah Jane* may as well hear that I've been second mate in the service to whom the *Strathmore* belonged, and that I held a chief mate's certificate. Now, is it your wish that I should take command of this brig?"

"Most sartinly it is," promptly replied William Somers, and in a breath there was a volley of "Yes—yes—that's our wish."

"Very well," said I. "My intention is to head for the Australian coast on account of the prevailing winds in these seas. Is that agreeable to you all?"

"Ay," they answered. I was boss ; whatever I did was bound to be all right.

"If we speak a ship willing to receive us," I continued, "I shall of course transfer the ladies aboard her and myself, too ; but as the original crew of this brig might not choose to leave her, then, if I can't get anybody from the ship we speak to navigate her, I'll stick to her and to as many as may remain. You've stuck to the ladies and me, boys, you have behaved as English seamen should in trouble, and last night you acted towards these ladies in such a way that I know they'll not be satisfied unless I thank you in their name for your kindness and consideration."

The poor fellows cheered this heartily, and I looked at Florence and Aunt Damaris who stood near me. My darling was blushing and smiling and glancing gratefully at the rough faces which confronted her. Aunt Damaris clearing her throat, exclaimed, "My niece and I are deeply obliged to you all for the use of the hut and for your excellent conduct throughout. I hope it will be in my power to thank you by something better than words when we reach Sydney."

Here there were murmurs of "We don't want no thanks of that kind, lady. We've done nothen to deserve thanks. We're all sorry that you ladies should ha' been brought into such a job as shipwreck ; but had ye been sailors ye couldn't have gone through it with more pluck."

"And now," said I, "who will you choose for mate?"

They answered that they would leave that to me.

"Then," I exclaimed, "I choose Mr. Shilling; and as William Somers has had the handling of the brig since her mate has been down with sickness, we can't do better than let him be second mate." This was agreed to; the crew were then divided into watches, and all hands went forward to get their supper.

"Upon my word, Mr. Seymour," said Aunt Damaris, "you manage sailors capitally."

"These are men very easy to manage," I replied.

"I think you would make a very popular captain," said she. "Don't you, Florence?"

"You will be sending Jack to sea again if you talk to him like that," answered my darling, with a little pout, and she put her hand through my arm. I noticed the look that came into the old lady's face when she saw and heard this. If ever she had wondered whether Florence were really in love with me, I fancy, from the expression on her, that her mind then and there was laid completely at rest on *that* head.

The cook brought some tea aft for us, and we went into the cabin for a meal. The fellow on the look-out had come down out of the fore-top, and the telescope was handed to the bo'sun, who, with

the glass under his arm, stumped the weather-side of the deck as knowingly as if he had never been at any other sort of work all his life. The heel of the brig was very great, for the breeze was now a strong wind, and all that the vessel carried she had, and seemed to be sailing on her beam ends. Why, even in the deck-house we could hear her lee channels tearing through the water, and the screaming aloft among the rigging was as though the poor old hooker were shrieking to have the fierce strain taken off her ancient bones. But I meant to give her no respite ; specially this evening, when the island was to be made in daylight if possible ; and it pleased me mightily to hear her thrashing through it, with an occasional half-smothered roar of water forward when she jumped her round bows into a bit of a hollow—a trifle of sea now running—and hurled the surge away from her, whilst her hull appeared to tremble fore and aft as if she were already breathless and ill with the excitement of such driving.

It was no easy job to make out a meal in that deck-house. The little table sloped up to our mouths, and all that was put upon it slid away in a huddle down to where it was hinged to the side of the structure. There were no “fiddles,” no comforts, nor conveniences aboard the *Sarah Jane*. It was like colliering ; only, instead of having civilized coasts within hail, we were fair betwixt the

Indian and Southern Oceans, midway between Africa and Australia. There had been a couple of big crabs cooked, brought to us, and we tried to eat them, but it was a hard job: the meat in them was delicious to our appetite, jaded by preserved foods and dry biscuits; and desperately tantalizing was the behaviour of the legs and shells and claws, which defied our forks and all our struggles to detain them upon the tin dishes on the table, and skimmed upon the deck-house floor with a vast deal more of alacrity than they could ever have exhibited in life. At last it came to my having to feed Aunt Damaris and Florence; which I managed by popping bits, at the end of a fork, first into my darling's mouth and then into her aunt's; and need I tell you, boys, which mouth had the choicest morsels? It was a funny meal, and they both laughed heartily as they bobbed at my fork, which I flourished with great grace and care; but the crabs were rare eating, and when the tea, or supper, or whatever you like to call it, was finished, Aunt Damaris declared that she hadn't enjoyed such a meal since she had left England.

I looked into the mate's cabin to see how the poor fellow was getting on. I had given orders to the cook to boil him some broth out of a piece of goat's flesh: and this, along with a crab, he told me he had eaten and greatly relished; but when I looked at him I could not but feel that food was not going

to help *his* illness: not a Lord Mayor's banquet brought every day to his bedside was likely to do him any good; his malady was only too surely some wasting disease, some failure or decay of a vital organ, not to be mended by the royallest fare that an emperor's cook could turn out. Yet I found him in pretty good spirits. He said it did him good to hear the brig humming through the water, and added, "She's tender down to a certain point; but after that the canvas would have to blow out of the bolt-ropes before she'd bury herself by another half-strake."

"Well, I mean to give her no rest," said I. "Had we had time, maybe I'd have shipped more ballast at St. Paul's, for it'll be all sagging with her, I'm afraid, on a bowline. But I'm too thankful to God to feel her under me to grumble at any point in her. D'ye know," I asked him, "if there's a razor aboard? I feel to look like a ring-faced monkey for the want of a shave."

"I think you'll find one in the captain's cabin," said he. "I don't know what the poor man had, I'm sure; but there'll be more conveniences for you there than I am able to offer you, sir," and he just lifted his head to look with a wan apologetic sorrowful smile at his chest.

I left him, and asked Aunt Damaris leave to enter her cabin, explaining that I wanted to seek for a razor there, and also remove the late skipper's

nautical instruments, charts, etc., to my own berth.

"The idea of asking *my* permission!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Jack, you can be very sarcastic sometimes. I shall not soon forget your explanation for having chosen the name of Egerton."

However, she was smiling as she said this, so I laughed out, seeing she meant nothing by it.

"Jack," said Florence, "can you conceive how Aunt Damaris and I are to manage for *clothes*? If the voyage is to last for two months—and you said that was quite probable—what *are* we to do for dresses?"

"Why, my darling," I answered, "what I said was that it might take this brig all two months, and perhaps three, ay, and even four, to reach Australia. But that's supposing we have to perform the voyage in her—an idea much too improbable to disturb us. We're sure to meet with ships good enough to transfer ourselves to, and it'll be strange if there are not women aboard who will help you to wearing apparel enough to last you till you reach Australia."

"But how long is that likely to be, Mr. Seymour?" said Aunt Damaris. "Remember, please, that Florence and I are absolutely without a change of—er—a change of——"

"I wish I could tell for certain," said I. "We may be out of this brig in a week—we may be out

of her to-morrow. Who can guess? But, my pet," said I, turning to her, "don't worry yourself over such a trifle as a change of dress. Think of the fearful island of St. Paul's already being miles astern of us, and that we are fairly under way for a port that will terminate all the abominable anxieties and sufferings you and Miss Hawke have undergone."

"Women can't help thinking of dress even in shipwreck," said she laughing. "It's not nice to feel a fright even in the midst of disaster. How *I* look, I'm sure I cannot imagine. I am thankful there is no looking-glass in the brig; I know I should peep at it, and I'd much rather not find out how I appear."

"How you appear!" cried I. "Be easy, love. Appear as you will, you can't help being lovely."

It made her as red as a rose to hear me, for she knew by the passion in my voice, and by my eyes, that I was speaking heaven's truth, as it seemed to me.

"And how do *I* look, I wonder?" exclaimed Aunt Damaris. "Fearful, no doubt!" and her old face bobbed up at me with a peck, as much as to say, "No nonsense, young man!"

"I'll say no more than this," I answered; "and I mean no compliment: you look ten years younger than you did when I first saw you at Gravesend. Think what you like of the sea, it has served you

well, Miss Hawke ; and your friends will tell you so when you get ashore, believe me."

Was I humbugging her? Not I. I meant to put her into a good humour with herself, and if a fellow can please an old lady in that way he ought to do it. Pleased she was, and you saw her adjust her starboard sausage curl as she glanced at Florence with a smile.

"But," continued I, "I hope there *is* a looking-glass in the brig—even a bit of one—for if I don't shave soon, my darling, I shall have to keep clear of you out of self-respect."

"You certainly would look better for a shave, Jack," said she. "Whiskers *might* become you when you get them ; but a tooth brush, dear, or what looks like the tips of a row of them——"

I bolted into their cabin, and was followed by a peal of laughter from both of them. I found a sailor's chest and a small locker ; the chest was half full of clothes, and nothing else ; but in the locker, besides an old sextant, I found a brush and comb, a hand-glass with a loop attached to the handle, three razors in cases, several pieces of soap wrapped in paper, along with some boxes of cigars, a handful of wooden pipes, a housewife well stocked, and a score of other odds and ends. In a corner was a bagfull of charts, and on a small shelf over the door a chronometer and a case of implements for navigating purposes, such as a

sector, a plane scale, and the like. These articles I conveyed to my cabin, and then emerging with the hand-glass I flourished it before Florence's face. She recoiled and shut her eyes and put up her hands and cried, No, she daren't look. So I gave the glass to Aunt Damaris, who immediately fell to exploring her own countenance, saying, well, on the whole she did not look so dreadful as she had feared; whereupon Florence said she did not mind taking just one peep.

But it was now time for me to bundle on deck; so, taking the brush and comb, I sallied forth, called to the cook and bade him get them washed and carried aft to the ladies, and then joined the bo'sun. It was seven o'clock; the sun was still fairly high in the west, and away about three points on the port bow was Amsterdam Island, distant about thirteen or fourteen miles. It lay green as spring grass against the sky, with the large reddish-coloured clouds sailing over it into the east. Astern, nothing was to be seen, nor on either hand. The sun was rising and falling among the lumps of vapour which were coming up in shoals out of the western sea, and whenever he hove himself clear of one of those bodies the fast-reddening light would come down in a perfect rain, gushing into the hollows of the seas till they looked as deep again as they were, and filling out the eastern seaboard in a manner to make the water-line there appear leagues further

off than the western horizon ; and a fine sight it was, I can tell you, to watch the effect of this lifting sunshine when a cloud drove up to the orb and seemed, with its shadows, to shoulder up the gush of light clear off the surface of the ocean into the level sky where it vanished, presently to reappear in our wake and come with a leap along the snow of it and the breaking brows of the surges, till the brig would be bathed in the pink glory ; while, scuppers under, and the wind flashing fair into her topsails with a screech as it split upon the rigging and with a moan as it swept out of the canvas, she drove jumping and groaning through it, dragging her bed of foam forwards with her as she went.

Heading as we were, first the southern, then the western, and then the northern portions of the island would be opened and compassed by us ; and I might be as sure as fate that if there were people there they would spy us coming. The flying light threw the land up clear and keen in the field of the telescope—that was a very good glass, though its coat was deplorably ragged and old—and I'd see the green of plenty of vegetation there, and an island very much more cheerful and habitable to behold than the hollow sterile crater-rock on which we had passed the night. But, look as I would, there was no appearance of a signal of any kind to be seen on the south and east side of it. I swept

the rugged line and foreground of the water with extraordinary care, but nothing resembling a boat was to be discerned ; though I reckoned that if any of the *Strathmore's* people had found an asylum there, they'd make haste to put off and intercept us when they saw the brig heading dead for the island. I went into the cabin to overhaul the charts, and coming across one of the Indian Ocean, with the prickings of half a dozen voyages upon it, I examined it to make sure of my navigation, for I had no desire to plump the *Sarah Jane* on a sunken reef hereabouts ; and, finding the coast clear, returned on deck, and stood conversing with the bo'sun while the sun sank lower and lower, and the island on the lee bow grew bigger and greener with the flush of the setting daylight upon it, and a coming and going of its emerald hues as the cloud shadows swept over it. Yet the sun was still above the water when the land was but a few miles distant, plain in the glass as a man's hand to his eyes, and the surf ringing it with the gleam of ivory.

"I'm afraid we shall find nobody there, bo'sun," said I.

"I'm afraid so, too, sir," he replied, letting the glass fall from his face. "There's plenty of stuff to make a smoke with, anyhow : there's plenty of clear top for a signal, too, and we're close enough to see a pocket-handkerchief if such a thing was

hoisted. If none of our people are there where *are* they, sir ?”

“Picked up, or drowned, or still knocking about—one of the three, certainly : for we know they’re not on St. Paul’s, and I’m afraid they’re not yonder.”

Aunt Damaris and Florence joined us to look ; and forward you could see all the men hanging over the rail staring at the land. Fathom by fathom we drove along, the old brig splashing savagely as she dived, and trembling under the pressure that was urging her ; her bowsprit pointed to give the island a clear berth, and the sun, whose lower limb was close to the water, nearly abeam ; fixedly I watched the land as it slowly drew aft past the starboard cathead on to abaft the forerigging, and so sternwards, until the red glory creeping up and up the green slopes till the topmost heights looked like burning gold, suddenly melted upon the blue of the sky and burned in the clouds beyond ; and when I withdrew my eye from the glass the sun was gone, and the greenish seas were rolling up to us out of an horizon that was like a whirlpool of crimson haze.

“Wheel there !” I sung out, “let her go off. Bo’sun, get the yards braced in for rounding into the eastwards.”

This was done, and the wind, by being brought aft, gave us a more comfortable deck. Curtseying

and rolling, as only an old waggon in ballast knows how, the *Sarah Jane* swept along a north-east course, sending the island veering away on the starboard quarter, and opening the northern and eastern sides of the land that was fast taking an olive-coloured loom in the deepening twilight.

“Stand by and heave-to,” said I to the bo’sun. “We must give our hopes a chance. But I very much fear it’ll be idle waiting.”

There was still a little twilight left when, with her maintopgallantsail stowed, and the mainsail and foresail hauled up, the brig’s helm was put down, and she was hove to with her head to the northwards. There was a flare-tin aboard, and from time to time we burnt this over the rail, the turpentine making a great glare that illuminated the brig from the eyes to the taffrail; and the light was so strong that every time it burnt itself out it left our sight useless for a spell, and the night seemed as black as thunder till the white foam showed again, and we saw the island like a lump of indigo down to leeward. But no response was made: no light was shown; and no boat appeared, though the merest phantom of one must have been spied, had it been there, by the eager eyes which hung over the bulwarks gazing and searching and probing the swarming waters with a sight intensified by eagerness to succour those who had been our shipmates.

“ There’s no chance, sir,” said the bo’sun to me after we had been hove to two hours, during which the brig had drifted away to the eastward, till the dark lump of land hung fair on the weather quarter. “ If there’s e’er a soul on that island our flare must ha’ been visible to ’em ; they’d know the meaning, and if they had a boat they’d launch it ; failing that, they’d kindle a fire to let us know they were there. Mr. Seymour, ye’ll find that rock as desolate as St. Paul’s.”

“ That’s what I think. But what do the men say ? If they choose, we’ll ’bout ship and stand off and on till daylight.”

The watch off duty had gone below, which was a pretty good hint that they had abandoned all idea of there being anybody to save off that island. Shilling called to the men who were on deck, and put the case to them. Should Mr. Seymour stand off and on during the night, and wait for the morning before sailing away ? They answered that they were quite willing, but they were afraid it would be of no use. “ If,” said one of them, “ the people fetched that island on the same day as we fetched St. Paul’s, they’d have their boats, for the weather was too fine to do ’em hurt. If they had their boats and was *there*, they’d have ratched off for us whenever they see the brig hauling into view. No boat appearin’, and no sign havin’ been made of there being life aboard *Hamsterdam*

Island, my notion is, sir, that we'd do no good by stoppin'."

All agreeing in this view, I bade them once again look over the side and have a good stare round; and then, having lingered another half-hour, I ordered the helm to be shifted, and the yards braced square for an easterly course. It gave me a kind of wrench to go away, though it afterwards turned out to be the right thing to do. I stood peering into the dimness astern till the bit of land that had gloomed out black and magnified even at the distance of three miles, faded into the general darkness, and where it had been, you saw nothing but a star or two low down, with the white water of our wake rushing out that way. The strong wind blew fair over the stern, and every inch of canvas the brig carried that would draw to a following breeze was set, and the old tub wallowed and splashed along her dark course. "This time last night!" thought I; and I looked aloft at the darksome spaces of canvas, as shadowy as clouds over the deck-houses, and then away into the south-west blackness where the island of St. Paul's stood, and where the night lay darkest, and where the eye found no other light than the pallid glimmer of froth creaming with a long simmering sound out of the inky running coils of water, and pictured the hut there, and the women under the boat's sail, and myself crouched in the corner near the door.

To think of *that*, to feel that week after week of such nights as this might have rolled over our heads without bringing us succour, was something, let me tell you, to force a wild shudder out of a man ; and it was to get away from my own thoughts more than for any other reason that I walked into the deck-house where the old lady and my pet were, and sat down to yarn with them awhile by the light of the old hanging lamp that swung by a stanchion amidships of the structure.

CHAPTER XIV.

RESCUED.

AND now, boys, having come to this point, it's about time that I turned to and ran this story ashore ; for if you haven't had enough of the sea, I *have* ; and I'm beginning to long for the sight of shops and streets and trees, just as you are, maybe, for the conclusion, to hear what the end of all this business was, and how my courtship finished. So the chief incidents of the next six days I'll give you in log-book form, making the journal look readable by dropping out the dates and the day's work and other items which swell out sea-diaries till they're little more than Greek to landsmen.

All that night the strong westerly wind chased the *Sarah Jane* with a middling run of sea that helped the old bucket along bravely, and the log sometimes gave as much as six and a half knots. I was up, off and on, throughout the night, sometimes in the bo'sun's watch, sometimes in William Somers's, and always found both men alive and

keeping a bright look-out, stumping one side of the deck, with a chap grinding at the wheel to meet the wild play of the frisky old fabric, the braces taut as the backstays, the wind shrilling out of the swollen concavities, and the thunder of parted seas under the bows, coming aft against the wind with a noise like the falling of a cataract where water smites water and roars into foam.

But when I came on deck next morning I found the wind east-south-east, bleak as November in the Channel, a thick horizon, smoke-coloured clouds rolling up with a spitting of rain that was swept past the mast horizontally, and the brig leaning down to her covering-board on the starboard tack, close-hauled with single reefs in her topsails, and her foresail looking as if but a little more weight of wind was needed to make eyes in it. Oh, it was a dismal sight for a man to come on deck to look at, and it made lies of the charts that set down the prevailing winds as westerly. You need only have glanced over the weather-quarter and seen the short oily wake of the brig floating out to windward to understand my feelings. Sailing! why, it was all leeway: and the road we had traversed last night we were harking back upon, driving backwards beam-first, without an atom of help for it. I didn't mind this so much at first, and, indeed, put a good face upon it before Aunt Damaris and Florence, telling them that though to

be sure we were not lying well up for Australia, our bows were more that way than our stern, and that there was no use in hoping for fair winds every day ; but I got restless and anxious when next morning came and found the wind still blowing strong out of the east, the sky dirty, the horizon thick as mud, and the seas of a stormy green, as they slanted their curling ridges at the diving bows of the brig and tumbled over her weather-rail before the drifting hull could wallow out of the trough.

After breakfast that morning I went into the mate's cabin to have a talk with him, but found him too ill for conversation. So instead of doing what I intended—taking his judgment as to whether it would be wise to make a fair wind of it by heading north and seeking a fair breeze in parallels nearer the equator for a run to the Cape of Good Hope instead of trying for Australia—I attempted nothing more than a little sympathy, feeling all the while even the uselessness of *that*, for if ever a man lay dying, he did ; you saw the shadow of what was coming on his hollow face, and his eyes had a dim yearning look as though for some time they had been striving to stare past the present, peering for a glimpse of a new kind of light whose dawn had not yet come. He had tasted no food, and I asked him if there was anything aboard the brig he could fancy—if there was

anything, indeed, that could be done for him. He answered, no : he had no appetite ; if there were a doctor or medicine he felt he might be brought back to life, he'd get some ease he was sure, and he only needed to be free of pain, he thought, to get better. But as it was, he told me he had no hope ; and the tears came into the eyes of the lonely, dying sailor as he said it.

The ladies knew that the mate was a sick man, but how bad he was I had not told them, nor could they imagine, for they had never set eyes upon him, nor did they once tell me that they had heard him groaning or complaining in his cabin. When I left him this time, I found Florence and Aunt Damaris at the table looking over a book or two they had come across in the captain's berth.

"I wish this weather would clear up," said the old lady. "The air's too raw and damp for the deck, and yet it's quite intolerable to be confined to this house and tumbled about in it as if one were in a barrel rolling downhill."

"It'll make home the sweeter when we get there," I replied.

"I shall be glad to sight a ship," she continued. "It will not matter which way she steers. Nothing that we can encounter is likely to be more slow in her speed and violent in her movements than this brig."

"How is the poor mate ?" asked Florence, with

a glance to let me know she was sorry that her aunt was in a bothersome mood. The darling could see I was worried myself, and asked the question to take the old lady off me.

"If he lives through the night," I answered, "it's as much as I dare hope for him."

They both started. "Is he dying! is he so near death as that?" exclaimed Florence in a low voice full of awe and pity.

"Poor, poor fellow!" cried Aunt Damaris.

"And he is lying alone there," said Florence, "without anybody to attend to him! Oh, Jack, you must let me go to him. It must be dreadful to die with people talking near you, and yet nobody coming to say a prayer, to utter a word, to show that you are thought of."

I told her to go by all means, saying that her presence would be sure to comfort the poor fellow, who might talk to her and speak to her of his home with more freedom than he would venture upon with one of his own sex; and then I stepped out on deck, being indeed too much troubled about the weather and the thoughts it put into my head, to dwell upon the mate, though in easier times the dying man would not, I think, have lacked plenty of sympathy and constant attention at my hands.

Shilling had charge of the watch, and I found him near the wheel, staring aloft at the topsails dark with the damp, with a look now and then at

the weather horizon that was near to us with the thickness, whilst the brig laboured distressingly amidst the hollows which came yawning out of the smother, green as bottle-glass and laced with froth that the wind now and again would chip up and blow over the rail.

"This is the second day of this beastly easterly wind," said I to him. "I wouldn't call it serious now if I could reckon upon a fair wind to-morrow or even the next day, to hold for a month or two, or to drive us into the arms of a ship. But it has an abominably settled look."

"Yes, it do look settled, certainly," he replied, slewing his moist face round the sea. "Whoever says westerly breezes prevail in these waters hasn't got much of the truth in him."

"I'd laugh at such weather," I continued, "if this brig could sail. But what's to be done with an old cask like this, that, even with the weather braces checked, drifts to leeward like the smoke from her galley chimney, and almost as fast."

"There's no use talking of ratching with her, that's plain," replied the bo'sun.

"We have barely provisions for two months," said I. "The ladies have no clothes but what they stand up in, and we *Strathmore's* men are pretty nearly as badly off. My fancy is to shift the helm and stretch away north and risk it; but think of the wind, after we had made a few hundred miles

of westering, coming on to blow again from the westwards! It's a fearful job to be in a vessel that won't go to windward. If we don't mind our eye, bo'sun, we may be knocking about in the *Sarah Jane* four months hence, and making a worse shipwreck of it than had we stuck to St. Paul's."

He tried to encourage me by saying there was no fear of that; we were bound to meet a ship; if not, we were sure to drive along somehow and reach civilized land. But I was in low spirits and unable to take a hopeful view. Why, even my former assured belief that we should sight a ship long before our provisions ran out and be succoured by her, became but a dim faint thing when I looked into the thickness, and reflected upon the huge surface of water we were upon, how little of it even in clear weather we were able to see, and how ships passing us at a distance of six or seven leagues only would be of no more account to us than were the great Indian Ocean unnavigated by any other fabric than ours.

I remained on deck all the morning, trusting that the weather might clear and enable me to get a view of the sun; and praying for a shift of wind and a visible horizon, with a mind worried by thinking whether we ought to hold on as we were, or to up helm and bear away north-west. At half-past twelve I went into the cabin for a bit of

dinner, and there found Florence and her aunt fresh from the dying man, both of them looking terribly dejected.

"We have been praying with him, and reading from a Bible he has," said Florence. "He is so very grateful. Oh, Jack, he is dying fast. He fainted twice after telling us eagerly about his mother, and how, when he is gone, she will have no one to support her. He knows he is dying, and oh," she cried, with her colourless face full of a kind of horror, "it's dreadful to notice how he recoils from the idea of being thrown into the sea."

"He'll not know—he'll not know it, Florence, when it happens," exclaimed the old lady. "Where *I* to die away from Sydney I'd rather be buried in the sea than in a churchyard."

"Yes," I said, "the ocean's a sweeter and purer cemetery than an acre of ground full of worms, and a hammock is a better coffin than an oak box. But for God's sake don't let us talk of death and horrors." And I started off at a rattle upon whatever cheerful thing that came into my head, sitting down beside Florence and fondling and soothing her, till I had brought something like colour in her face again. But preserve us! the situation was a wild one for those two to be in—a dying man hard by to emphasize their miserable condition, a crazy old brig staggering God knows where, through weather fit to make a man hang

himself, jumping, rolling, heaving, wobbling in a manner to fill every bone in one's body with an aching as sharp as rheumatism, amidships of the biggest track of ocean in the world, with eight weeks' provisions aboard for a voyage that might last as many months if ever it found a termination. I tell you, old Alphonso Hawke's palace at Clifton rose up in my mind when I glanced round the *Sarah Jane's* deck-house and contrasted the beggarly meal of a crab or two and a piece of coarse salt junk that went sprawling about the table, with the dinner Hawke had given us in his dining-room when I was looking love into my pet's eyes over the foaming rim of a champagne glass. And still—my darling was with me! That was something, after all, to put sunshine into the brig, though the sky lay like a lead-coloured sheet over the vessel; this old ocean that I was cursing and loathing for the foul winds of it had given her to me—the beautiful flower was in my breast, mine and nobody's else, come what might, whether we fetched England or Australia or whether we sank in each other's arms to the bottom of the sea; and though this last fancy was not over inspiriting, the rest was all so true that it put a sort of gaiety into me, and with my arm round Florence's waist, letting the old lady think my design was to support her, I chattered myself into something like good spirits and had them both

smiling soon and even laughing, though under their breath, for the sense of the dying man behind the bulkhead there was like a hush upon them.

He died that night. It was as black as pitch on deck, the seas breaking over the brig and the wind thick with salt water and squalls of rain; and I went into the deck-house to take the shelter of it for a spell, and when there, thought I'd step into the mate's berth and see how he did. I knocked, but Aunt Damaris said, "He'll be too feeble to answer you; he could scarcely speak to Florence when she was with him about two hours ago." So I opened the door and went in, and spied him by the light of the cabin lamp lying along the deck with his face down and his arms stretched out. I fancied he was in a faint, that he had wanted help, and got out of his bunk and fallen down for weakness, and swooned, till I looked close and saw a sluggish black trickle on the plank his mouth was against; and then, turning him gently, I knew by the first feel of him that he was stone dead, for the rigidity of a corpse that's growing cold is a thing not easily mistaken. God knows how he came to be on the deck. There may have come to him a death-struggle that rolled him over the edge of his bunk, or he had risen to summon help, being too feeble to shout for it. Anyway, there he was, dead. So I raised him—finding him to be shockingly light, little more, indeed, than a skeleton, and put him

into his bunk again; and then, just giving the news to Florence and her aunt as I stepped past, I told a couple of hands to lay aft with a hammock and needles and twine, and stitch the poor fellow up and carry him away forward for the sailor's last toss when the morning came.

It hardly needed this thing to sadden me. Of all the nights I had passed at sea none had ever found me so dejected, so anxious, so oppressed in mind as that one. I was weak enough to imagine some dreadful ill was soon to befall us, and that the distress of my spirits was a presentiment of it. The truth is, I was heavily weighed down by the sense of my responsibility. Here was I in sole charge of all the lives aboard this brig, and, as if that were not enough, one of them was so infinitely precious to me that the value of it made a load of the obligation almost too heavy for a young fellow of twenty-five years old, and who for three years had scarcely set eyes on the sea, to stand up under. They say that the need of preserving the life of one dear to you puts nerve into you, and will give you a kind of preternatural strength when you want it. This may be true of novel-heroes, but it's false if said of me. Why, if it hadn't been for Florence being with me, if I'd known she was safe at home, I'd have found our shipwreck and what followed in the island and aboard the brig little more than a trifling sea-incident. No, it was

the thought of *her* that kept me worrying. Oh, mates, it was true enough that I might forget her hardships and peril in the joy her presence gave me when I was in the cabin talking to her, fondling her, making her look at me that I might see her heart shining in her beautiful eyes, but it was otherwise when on that black evening I'd stop to peer at her through a deck-house window and then carry my gaze away to the motionless blackness overhead in which the brig's spars were no more to be seen than had she been a dismasted hulk, and watch the jump of her which you might have followed by noticing the dive of the black outline forward into the faint glimmering swirl she hove up in yeast and snow, and listen to the wild raving of the wind aloft and the rattling of spray falling upon the decks like a thunder-shower, and think of the tall light hull driving dead to leeward as though she would have me understand that no favouring wind could blow to urge her forwards, but that the first adverse breeze that followed would settle her back to the old spot again, and so leave us nothing under heaven to hope for but rescue from a passing ship. Yet though my boding was the most reasonable thing in the world, I don't forgive myself for it, it was unsailorly, and I'll not resent your sneers, though I'll ask you to remember that I had passed through enough anxiety to strain my nerves cruelly taut, and that my having command of

the brig forced more harassing thought into me than was likely to trouble the others who looked to my brains to haul them clear of their jeopardy, and not to their own.

Next morning found the weather unchanged, save that the wind was blowing a point more easterly. The sea had somewhat increased in height, and the brig was rolling with her decks full of water. I had the well sounded the moment I came on deck, but found the vessel staunch, which I accepted almost as a miracle, for she had been labouring heavily for many hours and her creaking and groaning might have made any man believe that she was working all the oakum out of her. The haze brought the water-line within a mile of us. William Somers was on deck, and he said to me, "Most unlucky weather this, sir. That hisland o' yourn'll be heavin' in sight presently again, I allow. We've done nothen for the last three days but to drift back to where we started from, and with the height of side the *Sairey Jane* shows, ye may reckon we've done all two mile an hour in that way."

"I've made up my mind, Somers," said I, "when we've buried your poor mate to up helm and use this wind. It's idle trying for Australia. Ay, and it'll be idle trying for the Cape. There's nothing for it but to try and run into fine weather and get taken out of this mud barge by a ship. Why, even

with a gale of wind astern, should we fetch the Australian coast in six weeks? No, and yet we have but a few weeks' provisions aboard, living as we now do on half allowance, which, if it weren't for a bit of pickled goat's meat now and again and those crabs which will be all gone shortly, either through being devoured or through putrefying, would pretty nearly starve the two ladies."

"Well," he replied, with a slow look round, "I think ye're about right, Mr. Seymour, sir. If we can't get more provisions there's nothen to be done with the brig by sailing of her. When the vessel as we spoke was willin' for to take us aboard and let the *Sairey Jane* go, I was agin that offer because I see the poor mate didn't relish the notion of giving up; but *he's* gone, and onless we want to follow him, I dunno that we could do better than ship ourselves aboard the first craft as may be willing to take us."

"Just so," said I; "and look at the brig! Is she worth salving? There's not a ha'porth of cargo in her, and I question if she'd fetch fifty pounds at an auction. She's only fit to scuttle, so as not to be in the way of the navigation. You'll get no captain to put one of his mates aboard to sail her to a port, and though I've promised to stick to her if you and the others who formed her crew refused to leave her, I'm too anxious to get clear of her not to earnestly hope you wish the same thing."

"Give us the chance," said he in his slow way, "an' I don't think ye'll find us willing to stop."

This answer was to my fancy; for, confound the fellow! I had really believed that he and his mates would stick to the brig if only for the wages they'd take up when they got ashore, and the promise I had made to stay with them if I could get nobody from a passing ship to navigate the old hulk stuck in my throat and was the most indigestible memory that ever hung in a lump in my mind till William Somers gave me that answer.

Well, we all went to breakfast at about a quarter before eight. The boy belonging to the *Sarah Jane* who waited upon us in the cabin came aft with the tea, and Florence and her aunt emerged from their berth. The first thing the old lady said was to ask me if we were making any progress towards Australia.

"Not an atom," said I. "If we're bound anywhere at all, it's to the island we're from."

"My gracious!" she squealed, and Florence, stretching out her hands, cried out, "Oh, Jack, what *are* we to do?"

I made my darling sit down by me and explained to her and her aunt that the wind was blowing strong from the east, that an easterly wind, like a cat, has nine lives, that we were not sailing at all, but drifting dead to the westwards, that the weather was as thick as mud and looked as if it meant to

keep so, and that when we had buried the mate I intended to square away for the Cape of Good Hope.

“And suppose the wind should change and blow from the west,” said Aunt Damaris.

“Miss Hawke,” I replied, “there’s no use in supposing. Let me give you some of this tea. Lord, it looks very yellow this morning—quite forecastle tea, I declare. But no matter: we must consider milk bilious, and imagine that the doctor has ordered us not to drink it.”

“This part of our fearful voyage would not be so very awful if we had only more clothes,” moaned my poor little pet.

“There’s no use complaining, Florence,” said Aunt Damaris. “Mr. Jack cannot buy clothes for us.”

“Though I would if I could, my own,” cried I, grasping Florence’s hand; “ay, though they had to sink me over the side with a deep-sea lead at my feet to come at them.”

“Oh, I know you would do anything for me, Jack, and I am very wicked to complain,” said she, with the flash of a tear in her eye. I kissed her with a noble disregard of Aunt Damaris’s presence, and the old lady, as was now customary with her, said nothing. In truth, ever since the poor thing had found out who I was, she had never been in a position to protest, and I felt that every kiss I gave

Florence in the presence of her aunt furnished her with one more argument to use by-and-by in my favour when she and her brother should come to correspond about or talk over this singular courtship.

When we had done our very wretched breakfast—and miserable as it was, half of it was lost through the abominable jumping and rolling, and sickening squelching of the brig—I told them that I was going to bury the mate, and advised them to stop where they were, for it would be a cold, wet, and dismal service, and only fit to deepen their melancholy. They agreed to remain in the deck-house. So looking into their cabin and finding a church service among the books there, I went on deck and told Shilling, who had relieved Somers, to get the body brought to the gangway and send the crew aft. Lucky it was for Aunt Damaris and my darling they were not present. Why, to be sure it does not do the most delicate-hearted of us harm to be brought face to face with whatever comes straight from God, as death does, but so many things which had nothing to do with death were mixed up with this sea-funeral that it was like to become a memory that could not benefit any one it took hold of; and I say, therefore, that I was glad that Florence did not form one of the crowd who stood upon the brig's maindeck. First of all, think of our situation, the perils we were fresh from,

our black outlook; and bearing that in mind, endeavour to view the picture with the thoughts such a position as we were in would put into you; the shroud of dark sky with bits of greyish scud sweeping along it, a girdle of damp thickness that would contract at times till it seemed to close around the brig in blowing rain, a high green sea with hard ridges which dealt the brig blows that kept every timber of her quivering, and every now and then a white crest curling over the forward weather-rail, when the round bows were stooped into a dark hollow, and washing up to our knees in foam in the scuppers, whilst the brig heeled over to the blow with a frenzied sweep of her spars that brought the heart of the close-reefed topsail with a kind of yearning thump against the mast; and then the corpse on the rail ready to tilt. Oh, mates! you know what those stitched hammocks are, with the lump of holystone in the clews! the meaning of what's inside stealing out through the rounded, pointed shape, and the seas snapping for it under the bends, and the rugged olive-green of the horizon waving and slanting close in the dimness which will open a bit at times to the squall that has rushed with a shriek through the wet masts and flies white into the gray smother to leeward.

Glad was I when the ceremony was over and the body gone. You saw poor old Somers stare with a sort of wild wistfulness beyond the rail when the

hammock flashed out of sight and the brig rolled wearily to windward with a hundred cries in her rigging and a long moaning sob of water washing fair along her lee bends, as if his tough heart had gone overboard with his dead shipmate and he was waiting for it to come back and make a man of him again. And staggering and lurching, but all as quiet as mice, the men were making their way forward when I sang out to them to man the fore and main-braces and stand by to haul the yards round square as the helm was put over.

“I’ll tell you why,” I called to them, thinking an explanation was due to them, and guessing they wanted it from the look in their faces; “this wind has been blowing for three days and nights, and if it hasn’t drifted us pretty near to St. Paul’s, you may take it, my lads, that that and Amsterdam Island are not far off. It’s useless thinking of Australia in the face of an easterly wind and in a brig that won’t go to wind’ard. So the bo’sun and Somers and I have come to the conclusion that we can’t do better than up helm, and let this breeze blow us west-nor’west for the Cape of Good Hope—or rather for clear weather, and the first ship we can signal that’ll take us off this scow-bank. That’s it, boys. Wheel there! let her go off—quietly. Watch her as she goes, my lad. Ease away your lee fore, and weather main-braces.”

And I ran aft to the wheel, to watch the squab

hull as she fell off. With the fore-topsail sheeted home, and the foresail loosed ready for setting, she rolled and wallowed round on her old keel dryly and handsomely. Every reef was shaken out, and the yards mastheaded, the topgallantsail set, and the mainsail with the weather-clew up, and with a couple of hands stationed forward on the look-out, for I had not the least idea of our position, having seen nothing of the sun for three days, and incapable of judging our drift owing to the unguessable send of the seas which had helped her along faster than the wind had shoved her, the *Sarah Jane*, yielding to the pressure, went staggering forwards with a fierce sputtering and creaming of foam under her bows, pitching so heavily as to make one's legs useless without one's hands, her course west-nor'west, and the wind yelling in half a gale over the weather-quarter out of the impenetrable mist.

Well, this turning tail proved a wise course after all, because for three more blessed days and nights did that east wind blow, thickening sea and sky at times till the brig was a mere phantom in it, swept onwards. I never got an observation; and within fifty or a hundred miles, maybe, I did not know where we were; but this did not trouble me, because, as we knew to our sorrow, we had countless leagues of sea-room before and behind and on either hand of us, and, as we steered, were bound

to run down the Cape of Good Hope if we could only hold on as we were long enough. I'd congratulate myself heartily on having determined to make use of this wind when I'd come on deck and find the *Sarah Jane* still swirling before it, with her bowsprit at north-west and the tall dark seas chasing her, with a gray albatross, perhaps, screaming in the hollow, and think of the picture we should have made had we still kept the brig's nose at the surges, the yards against the lee-rigging, nothing showing but a narrow band of topsail, the decks streaming and the vessel blowing away, like a buoy that's gone adrift.

This regular sailing moreover put us all into good spirits; the tall sides of the vessel kept her dry, the men were no longer being washed out of the deck-house by the tons of water which the brig when close-hauled had taken over her weather-bow; the motion, though violent enough, was regular, a long, sweeping seething run up, followed by a slanting floating rush down, then a kind of staggering roll in the trough upon the half-sea there, and a bit of a lull on deck with the canvas shouting above, and so on and so on, as rhythmical in its way as the stroke of a pendulum; and though there was no lack of discomfort, yet a deal of heart came into the faces of us all I noticed; more hope to Aunt Damaris's, more life and light to my pet's, as hour after hour

went by, and found the old brig with her clumsy wings outstretched, thrusting through the snow of the surges as if she were as anxious to sight a civilized coast as we were, and knew the road to it now that she had got her head west.

In all those days nothing was sighted, nor was that surprising in the midst of a smother that would sometimes make the near mastheads appear dim; yet, for all that, a bright look-out was kept, and there was no need to tell the men to skin their eyes either, as the whalemén say, for all hands understood the case exactly. Our dependence was upon a rescue by a passing ship; our eight weeks' provisions would soon be a month's, then a fortnight's, then a day's, and all hands had seen enough of the *Sarah Jane's* weatherly qualities not to need instruction to perceive that, unless we were taken out of her, why, long after the last fragment of biscuit had been devoured and the last drop of water supped, we might still be a thousand miles away from port.

Well, the night of the sixth day, dating from the first of the easterly wind, came and found the gale—for it was half a one, anyway,—moderating with a clearance around the sea. I turned in at midnight very anxious, wondering what we were to do if it should come to blow from the westwards, or even from the north, and for half an hour lay des-

perately restless and anxious under the old blanket that formed my bedclothes, till being dog-tired, as sailors say, I fell asleep and slept till daybreak. The thump of something against the deck-house outside aroused me, and hearing the sound of voices singing out and ropes flung down, I instantly went on deck and found the watch bracing the yards round to a light southerly wind. Astern the sky was brightening fast, and the pink of the coming sun was soaring up into the blue from behind the sea and floating along the water there. The weather was as clear as glass, a few stars languishing low down past the bows, and a southerly swell coming up in indigo folds ruffled by the breeze.

“Well,” said I to Somers, who had charge, “thank God that the wind is not west or north, anyway. Here’s a wonderful change since midnight. Anything in sight, I wonder?”

I was looking astern when I said this, and as I spoke the sky there was burning fiercely, and on a sudden the rim of the sun shot up like a gush of flame, and in a breath it was brilliant daylight and the firmament a dome of deep blue with a wreath or two of cloud in the south and a brightening of the azure into the east till it was all white glory. I took my sight off the dazzling quarter, for it was more than I could bear, and looked searchingly along the sea-line. All at once a man who had

been coiling down a rope close to where I was standing, cried in a breathless sort of fashion, "Why, what's that there? *Smoke* is it?" With one hand against his forehead, he pointed with the other a little way to the right of the sun, staring without a blink at the dazzle. Low as his cry was, others a little way beyond heard him, and three of them shouted in one voice, "A steamer's smoke, sir!" and joined us, pointing and bending and peering. *Then* I could see it plainly enough, a fine web-like dark line breaking away out of the haze of light and floating into the north. "Get me the glass!" I cried. It was brought and placed in my hand. I pointed it to where the line of smoke terminated, and gradually worked the lens along to where the vapour issued from the sea, by that means accustoming my eye to the brilliance there. Again and again I had to drop the telescope to clear my sight of the water which the brightness brought into it, and all the while the men stood round me so still that I could hear their deep breathing. At last I sprang out of my kneeling posture.

"Men, she's heading our way. The funnel and spars are lifting quick. She's coming along hand over hand!" I shouted.

A wild cheer broke from them.

"Where's the ensign?" I bawled. "Find it and hoist it, jack down, at the topgallantmast."

Somers sprawled over to a small flag-locker close against the wheel, and hauled out an old ensign.

"Let go the topgallant halliards," I sung out, "that the sail may be out of the road of the signal. Bend on and hoist away! up with it—up with it!" and in a moment the flag, jack down, was mast-headed and fluttering its red folds fair upon the breeze.

All hands were now on deck, for there is somehow a magic in a piece of exciting news at sea that will rouse out sleepers without a touch of the hand or a sound of the voice: and they all stood near the deck-house—a middling thick group—staring into the east. I was running to call Florence and Aunt Damaris when I saw them coming.

"What is it, Mr. Jack—what is it?" cried out the old lady in a sharp voice raw with excitement.

"Look!" I answered, pointing.

"Aunt, it's a steamer!" shrieked Florence, and the sunlight flashed in her eyes as she strained them wide open.

"Will she take us off the brig! Will she take us off the brig!" called out the poor old lady, like one shouting in a fever.

"Pray be calm, Miss Hawke," said I. "See up yonder—there's a distress signal they're bound to inquire into the meaning of. Oh, they'll take us

off, have no fear." And asking Shilling for the glass, I again knelt and examined the approaching vessel.

She was coming along at a fair pace, for when I looked this time her funnel was hove above the gleaming sea-line and her masts, whether two or more, came into one as she headed dead for us. Yet the splendour of the morning bothered the eye, and it took me a tidy while to make sure that she *was* steering right on for us.

"We'd better heave the brig to, Shilling," said I, "and get the gig ready for boarding the steamer."

So the vessel was brought close with her maintopsail to the mast, courses hauled up and staysail halliards let go; then the gig that had been stowed forward bottom-up was hoisted over the side ready for use, and there being nothing more to do, I recommended the men to get their breakfast, and remained aft with Aunt Damaris and Florence watching the steamer grow as she swung up over the shining round of ocean. Hand in hand with my darling, I stood answering as best I could the feverish questions the old lady fired into me when the men were gone forward.

What am I to make of my thoughts with pen and ink when I recall those that rose up in me as I'd glance from the pale, sweet, eager face of my sweetheart, with her hair catching a clear gold

tinge off the eastern sky and her red lips parted and her fingers tightening and relaxing upon mine with the emotions which the sight of the coming steamer put into her ; as I'd glance from *her*, I say, round upon the glorious morning that had opened out of the thick night and the driving gale, and see the ocean of a heavenly blue, lifting along in gentle folds to the sides of the brig that drooped wet into the violet declivities with a sharp flap of her canvas aloft and a thrilling creak throughout the length of her, and the resplendent east with the flaming sun widening in his wake the breadth of silver azure 'twixt him and the water, and then, to the left of the stream of flashing light under him in the sea, the black shape of the coming steamer dimming the blue air beyond her with streaks of lingering brown smoke. I endeavoured to persuade my darling and her aunt to take some breakfast, telling them that a full hour must pass before the steamer would be abreast of us, but the old lady flew at me with many violent pecks of her hatchet face, as if I had insulted her.

“Breakfast !” she cried. “What in the name of goodness, Mr. Jack, do you think we're made of that you can imagine we could eat anything at such a time as *this* ! Oh, it would be positively wicked even to *feel* hungry at such a moment !” and then after taking a wild yearning look at the steamer, she flung up to me, hove one arm round my neck,

entreated me to forgive her for answering me so sharply, and begged me to tell her, for the fiftieth time, if there was any doubt of the vessel passing by without taking any notice of us.

Half an hour after we had made out the smoke of her she was plain in the glass, a hand's breadth this side the sea-line, the white water at her fore-foot visible, and now I could make her out to be either barque or brig-rigged, with a yellow funnel, a high bow, a black hull, the sparkle of gilt under her short bowsprit, and the answering pennant flying at the mainmasthead. I fancied at first she was a man-of-war by the squareness of her yards, but I was soon undeceived by the slenderness of her beam and the mercantile furl of her canvas. All hands had turned up afresh and were clustered aft watching: and so we all stood talking about her as foot by foot she swept along, drawing further away from the brightness in the water, until porting her helm she stretched her length, slowing down her engines, whilst the gleaming stem-waves fell flat, and then she came to a dead stop, about five hundred fathoms distant from us, —a long, powerful iron ocean steamer of about two thousand tons register burden, slightly rolling upon the swell that made every polished object about her—glass, brass, bright masts, wet plates—dazzle out in the sunshine as if white fires leapt from her deck and sides.

There came a hail from her bridge: what it was I do not know. The gig was alongside: I told two of the men to jump into her, handed Aunt Damaris and Florence over, and then followed them, singing out to Shilling that if they refused to take all hands, I'd return, but that the ladies must be got aboard and left there anyhow. As we approached the steamer I saw them unship the gangway and throw some steps over the side. A crowd of heads along the forward rail watched us, but the decks were almost deserted aft, and I was pretty sure from the appearance of the vessel that she was a cargo boat. We swept alongside: I jumped on the steps, handed Aunt Damaris up, then Florence, and leaving the men in the boat, jumped on to the deck and looked around me.

Three or four men stood near the gangway: past them, aft, there was little to see, for the bridge and the deck-structures abaft the engine-room—I'm not sure of the terms steamboat men give their fittings—hindered the view. The people who received us stared hard. I dare say they were astonished to see two ladies come out of such a brig as the *Sarah Jane*, and from the cut of my jib they might easily reckon that I had no concern in that old boat.

"Can I speak to the captain?" said I to one of them.

"Certainly," he responded; "I'm the captain."

He was a tall, hearty-looking chap, with a kind of shyness in his manner as he glanced from me to Aunt Damaris and Florence.

“Captain,” said I, “you have come in good time. You find us in a bad plight. These ladies and I were passengers aboard the Australian liner *Strathmore*, that foundered in a collision on the night of the twenty-fifth of December——”

“Kindly come below, sir, and you, ladies,” said he, interrupting me; and led the way to a companion, down which we passed into a cabin, small indeed for the size of the ship, but exceedingly comfortably and breezy; with polished mahogany fittings, a table, a short row of cabins on either hand, and open spaces abaft furnished with sofas, over which were portholes or scuttles. He asked us to be seated, but Aunt Damaris’s heart was full; she burst into tears and fell to hysterically thanking him for preserving us from a dreadful fate, and in the hurry and feverishness of her mind was rattling out the whole of our story to him, when Florence, who was also crying, dear heart! gently interrupted her and gave me a chance to relate the yarn. This I did. The captain listened attentively. He had known the *Strathmore* well, and had also met little Thompson, and he was much concerned and astonished when I told him that of all five boats the gig alone had fetched St. Paul’s, and that though I had coasted

Amsterdam Island in the brig, and had hove-to and burnt flares, no response had been made, no sight of anybody living had been visible.

"Well, sir," said he, "how can I serve you?"

"By taking us all aboard this steamer. We can do nothing with the brig; she won't go to wind'ard; if we're not taken out of her we must knock about and starve, for nothing short of half a gale of wind astern will give her headway;" and I told him of our struggles in her during the week, and what stock of provisions remained.

"How many are there of you, all told?" I gave him the number. "Well," said he, "I'll take you with pleasure. But I can't do anything for the brig. She must be let go."

"She's good for nothing else," said I. "In my opinion she ought to be scuttled, for if she's found drifting she may tempt some shipmaster to put a crew aboard, and she's bound to starve them."

He laughed, and answered he didn't like the notion of scuttling her. She was apparently sound, and he might get into trouble if he sank her; it was one thing to succour people in distress who claimed his assistance, but he had nothing to do with the brig. We might scuttle her if we chose, but *he'd* have no hand in it.

However, it was a matter of no interest whatever to argue upon, so without more ado he and I went

on deck, leaving the ladies below, where, putting his head over the side, he sung out to the men in the gig to row aboard the brig and bring off their mates ; and at the same time he gave orders for one of the steamer's boats to be sent to the vessel to fetch all the provisions that could be come across out of her. Whilst this was doing I stood with the captain talking. From him I learnt that the steamer's name was the *Clanwilliam*, that she was a cargo vessel full up with wool, bound from Sydney, New South Wales, to the port of London direct, that the only passengers aboard were his wife and her sister, both of whom he supposed were still abed, though the steward should rouse them up presently if they did not make haste to turn out, and he made me feel very comfortable in my mind by saying he'd answer for it that they had linen enough between them to give my two friends a shift of what they needed.

"Well, captain," said I, "I may as well tell you that my two friends are one of them the sister and the other a daughter of a rich Australian who lives at Clifton, near Bristol ; they'll want you to treat them as passengers, and you may depend that no bill that your owners may send to Mr. Alphonso Hawke will be thought too heavy."

"Oh, that'll be all right," he answered. "Alphonso Hawke ? I think I know that name. I've heard it mentioned in Sydney. *He's* a father

and brother of the ladies below, eh? Well, well! I'm glad to be the means of helping them."

The chief mate of the steamer joining us, once again I spun them the whole yarn of our shipwreck, our day and night on the island of St. Paul's, the sufferings of the women, our horrible spell of navigation in the *Sarah Jane*, the cause that had brought the brig to the island, the death of the mate, and the rest of the eventful story. It was like being in a dream to look at the old hooker yonder rolling wearily upon the swell with the boats alongside her, and then at the long slope of deck running up into the turtle-back shelter in the steamer's bows, at the waste-pipe against the yellow funnel blowing out a flashing of white steam, at the boats on chocks on either side the funnel, at the barque-rigged spars slanting aloft into the blue, at the pole-compass forking up above the flying-bridge, at the wheel in front of the chart-house, and all the other points of this long slender hull that leaned softly as the blue swell washed along her wall-like sides. Why, though the sudden transition from peril to safety should have made the steamer a hardly realizable thing, yet to me she appeared indeed to be the only real thing among a whirl of phantoms that we had been struggling through ever since that dismal Christmas night. It was the brig, it was the island that seemed fanciful,—kind of nightmares out of which

I had awakened into this beautiful morning and upon this iron hull, with its metallic heart champ-ing under the struggles of the giant Steam, whose labours had for a little while been suspended.

The gig was some time in bringing off the rest of the men, and I explained to the captain that the reason was there were two maimed seamen aboard who would need to be handled cautiously; but both boats were not much longer away than five-and-twenty minutes, and then you saw them deep as their gunwales almost, lifting towards us over the azure folds, their oars sparkling as they rose and fell. They arrived alongside, the two injured men were carefully handed up and carried forward, the others followed and helped the steamer's crew to get the provisions from the brig aboard, and when this was done the *Strathmore's* boat was hoisted over the rail and the other boat re-stowed in her chocks. It was at this moment that Aunt Damaris and Florence came out of the cabin and stood some distance abaft the mainmast looking at the brig. I joined them, whilst the captain mounted the bridge. In a few moments the peculiar vibration of revolving engines was felt in the planking under the feet. The brig drew abeam as the steamer came round to her course; and high out of water, with her maintopsail aback, the ensign flying jack down at her masthead, the try-sail boom swinging as she rolled, there she lay, an

abandoned vessel, so pathetic in her desertion and solitude, with the endless leagues of blue stretching away past her into the bright sky of the south, that I was more moved than I have the courage to confess. She had saved us from God alone knows what dreadful fate, and I seemed to think of her as a living thing capable of such grief and passion as might visit a human heart as I looked at her receding astern, left helpless in the midst of the ocean, and thought "*That* is her reward!" Laugh at me, mates, if you will, but if a deserted, tossing ship which a man has never set eyes on before, will put sad fancies into his head, how much more should he be affected by the sight of the vessel that had rescued him, and one dearer to him than his own life, from a situation of deadly peril, floating away echoless, helpless into the mystery and the grave of the measureless, pitiless deep? I knew that my old shipmates had much the same sort of feeling about her that I had, for I saw them all looking in silence at her, whilst the steamer, feeling the propulsion of the churning screw, was raising white water under either bow and sending it spinning aft into a streaming riband of wake that was as full of colour with its bells and bubbles and whirling patches of snow and hollowing frosty eddies as a diamond necklace is in candlelight, till the sense of rescue surging uppermost in them along with the feeling that they were homeward

bound, they gave out their hearts in three hurricane cheers which went rattling along the water in a wild farewell to the diminishing brig. The exultant shout made me look at my darling, and our eyes met. Speak we could not; I could only take her hand and look at her and she at me till the gathering tears forced her to avert her face, whilst Aunt Damaris stood in a sort of trance, her hands convulsively locked, staring after the brig. "Ladies," said the captain, coming up to us, "I expect my wife will be up by this time. Let me take you below that you and she may settle about cabins for yourselves, where you may make yourselves comfortable for breakfast, which no doubt you're ready for, and which should be on the table in half an hour."

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT WILL MR. HAWKE SAY?

THE passage home was too uneventful to write about, even if I had room for it, or you had patience to listen to more talk about the sea. There was no longer the interest of the sailing ship. Calms and strong breezes we had in plenty, but they had nothing to do with us. Day and night onwards the metal fabric shoved, furling her canvas in the stagnant air or the head-wind, or expanding it to the favouring breeze ; and rounding the Cape, we climbed our way northwards over the equator into the tropic of Cancer, with familiar stars rising higher and higher over our bows every night, and constellations in the south settling out of sight behind the sea.

But the run was uneventful, at least from the shore-going point of view ; the worst that happened to us was a strong head-wind that delayed us over a week ; and so I'll pass over it, over the hours Florence and I spent together, over our conver-

sations with Aunt Damaris, over the kind and liberal treatment we received aboard the *Clanwilliam*; over many a matter which to relate would swell this yarn out into the longest story that was ever written, in order to come bluntly to the date of the fifteenth of March.

That was the date on which the steamer arrived off Gravesend, where I went ashore. Florence and her aunt had been landed off Plymouth for the convenience of being able to take train at once to Bristol. They wanted me to accompany them, but I told them it would suit me better to proceed direct to London in the steamer, there lay in a fresh stock of clothes, and then go down to my uncle's house. And yet, though it was to be but a short parting—as Florence and I hoped and prayed, and as Aunt Damaris promised—what a leave-taking it was, when it came to their going over the side into the cutter that was to carry them ashore! You'd have thought we were never going to meet again. Twice Aunt Damaris drew back from the gangway to kiss me—ay, boys, to *kiss me!* whilst as to my heart's delight—— But avast, Jack! you're out of all danger now, so tail on like a man to the end of this story and coil down and clear out and be hanged to you! for your jaw bids fair to carry you on till the crack o' doom shuts up all hands.

Well, you see, boys, that, shipwrecked as I had

been, I had saved my purse. It was in my pocket when I tumbled into the gig, before the *Strathmore* foundered; and in it were a ten-pound note and some sovereigns. This very easily carried me from Gravesend to London, by Tilbury; and the first thing I did when I got out at Fenchurch Street Station, was to buy me a bag, a night-shirt, a brush and comb, and other needful articles of that kind; and then, calling a cab, I went to the Tavistock Hotel in Covent Garden, where I wrote my name down in the address book as coolly, faith, as if I were just from Manchester or Leeds, instead of from St. Paul's Island in the Indian Ocean.

It was in the evening; I dined, and then wrote to my uncle, contenting myself with giving him the merest outline of my adventures with Florence and Aunt Damaris, and added that when I had rigged myself afresh—all my clothes having gone down with the *Strathmore*—I'd take leave to spend a few weeks with him at Clifton. This letter being posted, I withdrew to the big smoking-room, and sat till hard upon eleven o'clock, thinking and thinking, and sipping whisky and water, and pulling at a cigar, little heeding the crowds of provincials who were congregated around the tables, rattling away in many different kinds of British dialects, though if I hadn't been so full of thought it would have amused me to watch and listen to them. For what came home to me now was what would Mr.

Hawke say? Often enough, you may suppose, during the passage to England, my darling and I had talked about that, but somehow when at sea it always seemed too far off to thoroughly catch hold of, and you'd notice how little able we were to realize it or give our thoughts to it, by the way we'd break off and fall to love-making or talking of other things, as though, indeed, what views Mr. Hawke might entertain of my courtship and how he might come to decide about it were a very light trouble, easily hove on one side.

But now we were all ashore. By this time Florence and her aunt were at Clifton Lodge; maybe while I sat smoking and thinking, old Hawke was hearing the whole story, along with Aunt Damaris's recommendations of me, and her opinions on the subject of his friend Sir Reginald Morecombe's son; and what would he say? Into what agonies of fancy did I fall—tweaking at my bit of a moustache, flipping off my cigar ash, till I'd occasionally send the cigar itself flying across the room, sometimes staring at the ceiling, sometimes at my boots. I knew I had won Florence; I knew that if ever a girl gave her heart to a young man, she had given hers to me, that no earthly power was likely to wrest her love away from me, that Aunt Damaris would peck and fight for me now, with probably more heartiness than ever she had appealed to Florence on behalf of Morecombe.

But I did not know what old Hawke would say, and as I had not the least doubt, love me as Florence did, and faithful as she would prove as a sweetheart, that she would never consent to be my wife unless our marriage were sanctioned by her father, why, lads, I tumbled and twisted in that smoking-room arm-chair in a hundred mental convulsions and throes of imagination, till feeling utterly wearied, I rose with a prodigious yawn and marched off to bed.

I spent the next morning in going to my bank to see how much I was worth, likewise in ordering clothes and linen, and so forth ; and after lunch I went to the office of Duncan, Golightly and Company, to inquire if anything had been heard of the long-boat and quarter-boats belonging to the *Strathmore*. There is no occasion to relate my conversation with Mr. Golightly, beyond saying that the report of the foundering of the vessel had been received three weeks prior to the date of my arrival in London, and that news of the boats, excepting the one in charge of the carpenter, had been telegraphed, though, until I called, the gig had remained unaccounted for. The long-boat, Mr. Golightly informed me, had, while running during the night, been nearly swamped by a sea by which she lost her lights and compass. Unable to make a true course, Thompson had missed the island of St. Paul's wide, and was subsequently

picked up by a Dutch steamer, ninety miles east-south-east of that rock. The first lifeboat, during that same night, had sighted a small vessel when she was nearly into her, had hailed her, and her people were taken aboard, but the captain declined to seek for the other boats, and held on with his voyage to the Cape of Good Hope. The second and third boats had mistaken Amsterdam Island for St. Paul's, and the crews and passengers had landed there, but they had not been on the island an hour when they sighted a full-rigged ship standing to the westwards, and at once jumped into the boats and gave chase, eventually making themselves seen by her, after rowing and sailing for six hours. Of the fourth boat I may as well say here that she was never heard of, and it was supposed that she had foundered during the night. She was in charge of the carpenter, and her people consisted of Thompson Tucker, seven seamen, and six 'tween-deck passengers.

I am telling you this in an off-hand way, for the wreck of the *Strathmore* happened a good many years ago, and the interest it excited in an age when she was reckoned one of the finest of the vessels trading to Australia has long since been clean forgotten; but none the less do I remember how much astonished and impressed I was to hear of the long-boat missing St. Paul's and found knocking about ninety miles to the south and east

of that bit of land, and of the people of two of the quarter-boats having reached Amsterdam Island, and escaped from it two days before we in the *Sarah Jane* rounded that rock and hove-to and burnt flares in the hope of some of the crew and passengers of the *Strathmore* being ashore there. Certainly there is no limit to the surprises of the deep; and as a truly lively sample of them, I often mention the good luck of the quarter-boat that met the small vessel, and was rescued by her in that dark night, when we in the gig were being swept before the breeze, sitting and holding on for our lives, scarcely able to see a fathom past the gunwale. So that, let landsmen think as they please, the fact is that the nearer one comes to what may sound improbable or even impossible to them, the closer one gets to the truths of the ocean and to sailor men's experiences.

Well, my next move, after calling on the firm of shipowners in Fenchurch Street and hearing about the boats, was to visit the offices of the owners of the *Clanwilliam*. My wish was to ascertain the charge I had put those owners to by their ship bringing me home from the Southern Ocean. But they declined to make any charge; they said their captain had merely done his duty in rescuing me and the others from our dangerous situation, and there was nothing to pay. This led to the most amicable contest I was ever engaged in, but finding

them firm, I went away, and on reaching my hotel, sent them a cheque for twenty-five pounds, to be divided among the crew of the *Clanwilliam*, and I requested that the captain would do me the favour to purchase some little trifle to remember me by out of his share of the money. It was as much as I could afford, and though perhaps it might about pay for my maintenance and the use of the cabin, &c., I could not speak of it in relation to the debt I owed the ship; for that, God knows, was not dischargeable by money. Anyhow, it would have gone against my grain to have used the *Clanwilliam* and lived comfortably aboard of her, without paying something for the privilege, and consequently I was very pleased when I received a handsome letter of acknowledgment from her owners, thanking me for the cheque and accepting it for the crew.

It was on my return to Covent Garden that I found this telegram from my uncle awaiting me:

“Thank God you are safe. Come to us as soon as you possibly can. All well here. Heaps of news.”

There was nothing to detain me in London but the tailor, who kept me waiting three days, though I am happy to think I made his life a burden to him by many violent threats of leaving the “garments,” as he called them, upon his hands if he did not punctually deliver them on the day

and hour promised. They were three long, dull, tedious days to me. I had no disposition to visit my old haunts. All the time I was thinking of Florence, wondering what Mr. Hawke would say, what news of Mr. Morecombe I should hear, what my uncle had to tell me and the like; and yet impatient as I was to get to Bristol, I'd sometimes think the delay was fortunate, as it would give Mr. Hawke time not only to hear what Aunt Damaris had to say, but to digest her views about me and get to understand his daughter's heart. Still I did not dare feel hopeful. Being fairly ashore again, all the past rose up strong and sharp. I recalled how I had laughed out at Mr. Hawke when he rolled up to my little lodging and requested me to leave Bristol; how he had fumed over the attention I paid his daughter at his dinner-table, how he had described me to his sister as a common young sailor chap, how he had quarrelled with my uncle's family on my account: and then I'd think of his veneration for the aristocracy, and ask myself whether I had a right to suppose that my chasing his daughter to sea and being shipwrecked with her were circumstances likely to alter his snobbish views, and cause him to think me good enough to take the place of that blood which he had sent his daughter on a disastrous voyage to obtain.

At last the materials I needed for a wardrobe

reached me, and fully equipped with all the toggery I required, I went down to Bristol, meaning to take my relatives unannounced. My heart thumped hard under my waistcoat as I drove up to Clifton. It seemed but yesterday that I was at Bristol, and yet when I came to look back, so much had happened since that there seemed to be enough of hopes and fears and hardships and love-making to fill up the canvas of half a dozen of years. Dreams! heart alive, a man doesn't need to go to bed for them. What visions that ever came before me in my sleep approached such experiences as my sitting one day in a little bit of a lodging in Bristol, madly in love with a girl and thinking of her as something as remote from me as the angels are who live in Paradise past the blue skies, and the next day, so to speak, cast away with her upon a desolate ocean rock—with her and the old lady who was running away to Australia with her to escape me? And as the cab rolled upwards and I peered out first to starboard and then to port through the windows at many a sight that was familiar to me, and thought of the anthem in the cathedral, the locket my darling had given me—still snug in my breast—and the letters, the meetings, the voyage, and NOW, why, the strength of my passion for her was so great, my love so overmastering, that I felt it would break my heart outright, that life would be so desolate a blank

to me that I should not know what to do, where to go, what to live for, if she were denied to me after all that had passed between us—if she refused me because her father rejected me, loving me as I knew she did—ay, boys, as truly as I loved her.

The cab stopped, I sprang out and rang the bell, and whilst I waited for the door to be opened I stole a glance round the grounds—at the seat up in the corner where I had told Florence I loved her, at the summer-house where I had sat grinding my passion into the earth with my heel through the mortification I had felt on finding that Florence had not invited me to the dinner my relatives had been asked to. The man-servant appeared, and when he saw me he gave a great start, and then broke into an immense grin. I dare say he remembered the two half-crowns I gave him one evening for bringing me certain letters.

“Is my uncle at home?”

“Yes, sir; he’ll be glad to see you, Mr. Seymour, sir;” and I had pulled off my hat to hang it up when my uncle appeared at the end of the hall. It was just a shout and then a rush and a mad grab at my hands.

“My dear Jack! my dear Jack! my dear Jack!” was all he could say.

“Here I am at last!” I cried. “My dear uncle,

how are you? How is my aunt—how are my dear cousins?”

A loud shriek on the staircase announced the presence of Sophie. The dear creature came whirling down like a squall, and in a breath I stood suffocating in the most extravagantly hearty embrace I was ever saluted with. Her resounding cry brought out my aunt and Amelia; and now behold me, the centre of an ardent and quite overcome group, revolving like a top to their handshaking, hardly knowing whether to cry or to laugh, dragged here and there till an eye-witness might have gone away and sworn he had beheld a free-fight, and at last carried off by my uncle into the drawing-room, where I was plumped into an arm-chair and instantly surrounded.

They were not newly-born infants when I quitted Bristol, and consequently seven months had not worked the least discernible change in them. Maybe there was a slight increase in the breadth of my uncle's smile and in the heartiness of his laugh, as if the purpose of his life now lay in the steady development and improvement of these two physical qualities, and it is just possible that the train of my aunt's dress may have grown fractionally longer since I was last in her company, but in no other respect were they altered. I looked around this healthy and happy assemblage of faces, from my uncle with his high Roman nose

and delighted countenance to my aunt smiling and handsome and dark-eyed, on to corpulent Amelia with her chins, and to Sophie fat and loving—one mass of sympathy from her hairpins to her heels—and felt that a man who had such a family of relatives as these to come to after a shipwreck might fairly consider that he was not wholly abandoned by the gods. Our conversation at the first start I could no more put down than I could attempt to express in writing the quick jabbering of a crowd. Whole broadsides of questions were fired into me, ejaculation after ejaculation let fly, until my uncle, seeing that we might sit together thus for the rest of the year and yet come no nearer plain sense and a clear narrative, whipped me off to my bedroom and there left me, to join the family at my leisure; “and don’t be in a hurry, Jack,” says he, “for I can assure you we want time to cool.”

However, I did not stay long upstairs, and when I returned to the drawing-room a glance at my cousins and aunt enabled me to guess that we should now be enabled to make some headway with our conversation. They all drew about me afresh, and Sophie cried out, “Jack, you are looking wonderfully well—quite handsome, I assure you.”

“Brown as a nut, Jack,” exclaimed Amelia. “Certainly the sea agrees with some people.”

"But how can I be smiling and talking to you and looking at you?" said Sophie. "Oh, Jack, can I ever forget that you followed Florence to Australia without giving me the least idea of your intention?"

"Now, girls," bawled my uncle, "let's have no nonsense. Only talk what you mean, and then we'll get along."

"I suppose Florence and her aunt have arrived at Clifton Lodge," said I.

"Oh dear yes," answered Sophie. "We called upon Florence yesterday. Papa and Mr. Hawke are friends again now, Jack. But do you know that Emily Hawke is dead—poor Emily whom we used to meet in the bath chair?"

"Is it possible? The news will have been a heavy blow to Florence, I fear," said I. "When did she die?"

"On Christmas night," responded my aunt.

"Heaven preserve us!" I exclaimed, "that was the night on which we were wrecked. Mr. Hawke came very near to being rendered childless altogether on Christmas night."

"Poor fellow, it nearly broke his heart," said my uncle. "You'll find a wonderful change in him. No more pomps nor vanities, Jack. Sorrow has caught hold of him as you sailors catch hold of a swab, and wrung him out. He invited me to the funeral and then we struck up an acquaintance

again, and since then we've been good friends. He was very fond of Emily—she was his pet, I think : far ahead of Florence in his affection."

"It was very sad," said my aunt.

"How is Florence bearing the news? for it will be fresh to her," I asked Sophie.

"Pretty well, I think," answered Sophie. "She has gone through so much since she left home that grief can't be expected to pierce so deep as it would had she not been shipwrecked and gone in fear of her life for I don't know how many weeks."

"A fine bit of reasoning that, Sophie," said my uncle. "But it'll do, my dear. The truth is, Jack, Florence is too full of what the old poets would call your ravishing idea, to suffer acutely from any blow that isn't aimed at your lug."

"That's about it," observed Amelia.

"And can you give me any news of Mr. Morecombe?" I inquired, looking from one to another.

"He's not been seen in these parts since the *Strathmore* sailed," answered my uncle.

"There is no doubt that he and Mr. Hawke have quarrelled," exclaimed Sophie.

"You know nothing for certain, then?" said I.

"You see, my boy," observed my uncle, "the subject's a delicate one. Hawke knew that I was aware Morecombe had left the *Strathmore* sea-sick,

and that you had pursued the voyage with Florence. We did not speak until after Emily's death. The poor old chap's bereavement made me anxious to say nothing to pain him or give words to any unpleasant memory. But you'll get all the news about Morecombe when you meet Florence."

"At all events, Jack, you may take it from me," said Sophie, "that you have nothing more to fear from that odious young man."

"It'll be three weeks ago, dating from yesterday, Jack," said my uncle, "since Mr. Hawke called upon me in a hurry, with a face as white as your shirt. 'Mr. Seymour,' he cried, 'I have just received some dreadful news from the owners of the *Strathmore*. She has been in collision and foundered in the Indian Ocean. Only one boat picked up by a small vessel has been as yet accounted for. My daughter and sister were in the gig in charge of your nephew. Oh, my God!' he cried, hiding his face and sobbing terribly, 'if my daughter should have perished! if my poor girl should be drowned!' The news was a terrible shock to me, Jack," continued my uncle, all of us listening to him with grave faces and in dead silence; "I thought of you, my lad, and how your young life might have been cut off by a bit of wild romance in the manufacture of which I was pretty nearly as guilty as you. However, I bottled up my feelings and put a good face on the matter, and

told him that you were a sailor, that if the ladies were with you they were in first-rate hands, and urged him to wait a bit before giving way to his grief, since any hour might bring the news of the other boats' safety. Well, Jack, a few days ago there came a note from him: 'My dear Mr. Seymour, I have just received a telegram from Plymouth announcing that my daughter and sister have been landed there by the steamship *Clanwilliam*, and that your nephew has proceeded in the vessel to London.' The letter was to that effect, and it wound up with a fervent thanksgiving to God. Jack, it did me good to get that letter. The fear of your loss had weighed very heavily upon us all, my lad."

He seized and held my hands, whilst poor Sophie wept and my aunt said, "We were miserable from the moment Mr. Hawke called down to the hour on which we received his letter telling us you and Florence were safe."

I was not a little moved to look around upon their kind faces, and judge by what I saw there that had I been their son or brother their affection for me could hardly be much deeper than it was. I fell to talking to them about the voyage and, as you may guess, had so much to say that it was within half an hour of dinner-time before I brought my yarn to a close. I don't know that I skipped a single point of consequence. I told them of the

name I had shipped under, how impressed Aunt Damaris had been by it, how I had shared one of the cabins with Morecombe, his manner of speaking about old Hawke, his fearful sea-sickness and departure from the vessel off the Isle of Wight ! and in all my life I never heard people laugh as my relatives did—one and all of them—my aunt crimson and my uncle lying back till I thought he would explode, when I described Morecombe's drunken behaviour as he went over the side and Aunt Damaris's appearance as she watched him. Then I gave them an account of the voyage, the passengers, Aunt Damaris's liking for me as Mr. Egerton, and so on, till I came to the collision, and our night in the gig, and our stay on St. Paul's, and our getting away in the brig. Why, lads, until I came to tell the story, I protest I hardly knew what a real romance it was. Yet you'd have known there was the proper sort of stuff in it to seize and hold the attention, rudely and briefly related as it was by me, had you watched my listeners following every word that fell from my lips with a sort of fixed breathless stare at me, as though they feared if they did so much as wink their eyes they'd miss something.

“Wonderful !” shouted my uncle when I had made an end. “Jack, it's the biggest thing in shipwrecks I ever heard in my life.”

“What a romance !” cried my aunt. “Think

of two lovers cast away upon such a rock as Mr. Jack describes."

"With an old aunt to look after them," said Amelia.

"Oh, Jack," exclaimed Sophie, "when Florence is your wife what a deal you will have to talk about!"

"Meanwhile," said my uncle, "dinner will be ready soon, so let's get ready for it."

Well, right through the dinner the talk was all about the shipwreck and the island; and afterwards, when my uncle wanted his cigar and exhorted his wife and daughters to withdraw and leave us alone, they refused to go. No, they liked the smell of smoke; it was ridiculous to ask them to withdraw, there must really be a limit to men's tyranny. And they clung to their seats whilst I went on yarning about Florence and the *Strathmore* and Aunt Damaris.

"And now, Jack," said my uncle, smoking with his feet hoisted up, "what do you think old Hawke means to do?"

"I only wish I knew," said I.

"Why, papa, what *can* he do? particularly after Florence and Jack have been cast away together," exclaimed Sophie. "Of course he'll sanction their marriage."

"I don't really see how he can help it," observed my aunt.

"Anyway," remarked my uncle, "you saved her and her aunt's life, and that ought to make a great hole in the old chap's gratitude."

"I can't pretend I *saved* their lives," said I. "We took our chance together and came out of the mess safely."

"And what d'ye call steering the gig through a gale of wind and navigating the brig for a week?" cried my uncle. "Would they have saved their lives without you?"

"Not so much as you think is due to me, uncle," said I very truthfully. "But no matter about that. Thank God my darling *is* safe—at home at last on solid English earth. It's enough for me to know."

"I don't fancy," said Amelia, "in spite of your experiences, Jack, with Florence and her aunt, that Mr. Hawke would have been disposed to favour you. People's natures, you know, are not to be changed in a few months by things which don't affect them very violently, and Mr. Hawke's prejudices against you and his views on the subject of blood are much too stubborn to be shaken by a shipwreck out of which his daughter has come safely."

I sat looking on her with a long face.

"But," continued she, "Emily's death has undoubtedly changed his character. Everybody says it has made him less worldly. He is very regular

at church and looks dreadfully sad. When I think of this change, and of the still further softening effect Florence's safety will have had upon him, I am of opinion that you will not find him objecting to your marrying her."

"I'm glad you wound up in that way, Amelia," said I, "for hang me if ever a speech opened more dismally."

"Amelia's too oracular," observed Sophie. "However, I agree in what she says."

"There is another consideration," exclaimed my aunt. "Miss Hawke is now Mr. Jack's friend."

"Ay, tooth and nail," said I. "If it depends upon her you may look upon me as a married man."

"Well, Jack," cried my uncle, "boil me if you don't deserve the girl. Such perseverance is worthy of the sort of courtship that was customary when I was a lad—when love was love, not a twopenny spell of ogling followed by a skedaddle. Why, dash my wig," he exclaimed, eyeing me admiringly, "but she'll make ye a rich man though. Now poor Emily's gone, there's nothing 'twixt Florence and her papa's will, unless the old fellow goes off his head and signs away everything he has to a hospital."

I waved my hand with a young lover's profound indifference to money. "If I marry her, it'll be

for herself," said I. "Let the condition be that I take her in the clothes she stands in and with nothing else, and I'd thank God for bestowing upon me the noblest gift that ever enriched mortal heart."

"Those are the sentiments for me!" cried my uncle. "But at the same time, Jack, don't go and make an ass of yourself by repeating them to old Hawke. You know he might take you at your word."

"Oh, papa, how horribly prosaic you are!" exclaimed Sophie. "Jack's ideas are beautiful, and it's a shame to spoil them. But do let us go into the drawing-room now; this tobacco smoke is quite suffocating."

Well, lads, whatever my fortune was to be I was not long to be kept waiting in suspense. Unknown to me, Sophie that evening sent a line to Florence to tell her that I had arrived; and next day, shortly after luncheon, whilst I was walking with my dear cousin in the grounds, talking to her about my darling, and how over and over again she had owned her love for me, a man in livery arrived from Clifton Lodge with a letter addressed to me. My heart set off like the driving-wheel of a locomotive. I looked at the handwriting: it was a woman's, but it was not Florence's. The enclosure ran thus:

“DEAR MR. JACK,

“Will you come and dine quietly with us this evening at half-past six? But as my brother and I have something to say to you, if you can manage to come, say at four o'clock, we shall be very pleased indeed to see you. Florence does not know I am writing, or you may be sure she would send her love. The servant will bring back your answer.

“Yours very sincerely,

“DAMARIS HAWKE.

“P.S.—I am all anxiety to see you again.”

Without ado I trotted into the house, wrote an answer accepting the invitation, and promising to do myself the pleasure of calling at the hour named, and despatched it by the servant, scarcely heeding that Aunt Damaris was pretty sure to grin at my handwriting, whose tremulousness would have disgraced a man of ninety. The instant the gentleman in livery was out of sight I bounded over to Sophie and thrust Aunt Damaris's letter into her hand. “What do you think of *that*?” I shouted.

She immediately devoured it with a face that was a study for its agitation.

“Oh, Jack!” she cried, “it's all come about! “it's all come about! They wouldn't invite you

in this way if they didn't mean to give Florence to you. Oh, you lucky boy! Jack, I must kiss you!" And kiss me she did, pouring a hundred congratulations into me as she stepped back to survey me, and ended in catching hold of my arm and running me into the house to seek Amelia and her mother, and show them the letter.

I took fifty minutes to dress myself, and then had to wait three quarters of an hour. Mightily pleased was I by the cut the tailor had given my dress-clothes, and not a little satisfied with the ocean-brown that tinted my face and made me look as I surely never had appeared during the three years I had passed in knocking about London. Before I quitted the house, my relations gathered about me to fortify me with a thousand good wishes. "Don't be too sentimental, Jack," my uncle said. "Love is a fine thing, much too good to starve; so mind your eye, my lad. Don't let your emotions give Hawke a chance. Mind now! for I know what poetical young men are."

I shook hands all round as if I were going on another voyage, or to my execution, and jumping into the phaeton was rattled off to Clifton Lodge. It was only a few minutes' drive, but there was a vast deal of thought packed into it. Talk of compressing the essence of a bullock into a small tin can! As many fancies as would have served me for a twelvemonth were jammed into that short

journey ; and when the phaeton halted abreast of Clifton Lodge my brow was cold with dew, distilled, no doubt, by an imagination that had been doing in five minutes the work of pretty nearly as many years. I rang the bell, and hearing it tinkling was afraid I had pulled it unnecessarily hard. What a fine house it was ! Not to my taste, to be sure ; but nevertheless a kind of palace in its numerous shining windows, all superbly draped, its conservatories, the statues atop of it, the pillars, the terrace on the left, and so on. During the minute I was kept waiting, up swarmed the memory of my first visit, the walk to the cathedral, the drive, the lunch—why, when I thought of what had happened since, that visit might have been made a hundred years ago.

The door was flung open and I entered. The man-servant, taking my name, ushered me into the drawing-room, and I sat down feeling for the moment, amidst that wilderness of gleaming marbles and mirrors, tables, curtains, and the deuce knows what besides, almost as lonely as I did that night on St. Paul's when I looked up at the black rim of the crater and saw the stars hanging over it. How often had I thought of *this* room during that time ; contrasted the splendours of it with the miserable hut, the old creaking brig's deck-house ! And now here I was, sitting in it, waiting—for what ?

The door opened and Mr. Hawke entered, and close in his wake was Aunt Damaris. I looked, scarcely knowing if *another* was behind, but the door closed upon those two. I rose and gave them a bow. Hawke put out his hand, but before I could take it, Aunt Damaris brushed past him with both hands extended.

“Mr. Jack, I am glad to see you again. I am glad indeed to see you again,” she cried. “Oh, what memories your face recalls! How are you? You look wonderfully well.”

I thought she meant to embrace me—it wouldn’t have been the first time, as you know—but she contented herself with holding my hands and continuing to shake them for some time, meanwhile peering steadfastly at my face with the old familiar pecking gesture. The warmth of her reception put me speedily at my ease, and when she released me I gravely shook hands with Mr. Hawke, expressing in a few words the deep sympathy I felt with him in his affliction. Aunt Damaris was in crape, and he was clad from head to foot in the blackest of black cloth, and yet the suggestion of mourning lay not nearly so conspicuously in his clothes as in his face and bearing. He had the appearance of a man utterly bowed down and crushed by sorrow. He stood with a kind of stoop, his skin was the colour of dry sand, and I could trace but little of the sharp gleam that I once took notice of in his eyes. He

merely bowed to the few words I let fall about his loss, and asking me to resume my chair, seated himself at some little distance from me with his back to the light. Aunt Damaris, on the other hand, drew a chair close to me. "Mr. Seymour," said she, "is it not strange to find ourselves safe and snug at home after our adventures? My brother wonders how we could have survived so much downright misery. Oh, I must tell you that I have not forgotten Mr. Shilling and the *Strathmore's* men. I sent the firm some money to distribute among them. I hope it will be given to them."

"Oh, sure," said I.

"And here am I in England again," she rattled, "after having in vain endeavoured to get to my home in Australia."

"I presume you will be making another attempt before long, Miss Hawke," said I, with a glance at her brother, who was eyeing me without offering to speak.

"Oh, certainly. My heart as well as my home is in Sydney. But you'll not catch me making the voyage in a sailing vessel again, Mr. Jack. What dreadful calms we encountered, do you remember? Alphonso, you cannot imagine what we suffered on the equator."

"Damaris," said he, speaking very slowly, but without any of his old haws and hums and word brandishing, "perhaps you will give me an oppor-

tunity to thank Mr. Seymour for his attention to you and Florence during your hardships ! ”

“ I beg that you won’t thank me, Mr. Hawke,” I exclaimed. “ I have been sufficiently rewarded by the confidence your sister reposed in me and by having seen your daughter safe out of that shipwreck.”

“ Well,” he continued, with a painful smile, “ I must thank you if only as an excuse to conduct the conversation to a subject of deep interest, I am sure, to all three of us. The terrible blow that has shattered my health and destroyed my spirits——”

“ My dear Alphonso ! ” briskly expostulated Aunt Damaris.

“ Finds me,” he went on, with a slow look at her, “ but little in the mood to reason upon the motives which were influencing me when you and I first made acquaintance, or to offer any remarks upon your pursuit of Florence. I need not deny, Mr. Seymour, that I was very greatly deceived in the young gentleman whom I had wished to see united to my child. I implicitly accept my sister’s story of a very great piece of impertinence and vulgarity on his part—— ”

“ Leaving the ship drunk, as you know, Mr. Seymour,” interrupted Aunt Damaris, “ and swearing dreadfully.”

“ And his subsequent behaviour,” continued Mr. Hawke, “ has been—— ”

"He is actually going to be married!" cried out Aunt Damaris. "*There's* a pretty lover! In a few months he forgets all about the young lady he pretended he was fond enough of to follow to Australia, and offers his lovely person to another! I wish to goodness she had seen him leave the *Strathmore*. Oh, Alphonso, you are well rid of him. He's a most ignoble creature."

"Damaris," exclaimed Mr. Hawke, "I'd rather not discuss him. He is really nothing to us now. Florence's aversion was sound, and I admit the wisdom of it. And, Mr. Seymour," said he, with a faint touch of the old haw, haw sounding in his voice for a moment, "it is only proper I should tell you that just as I was mistaken in Mr. Morecombe, so I erred in my judgment of you. I wanted my way and you were thwarting me, and my temper obstructed my view. You have since most honourably justified your claims upon my attention as a young man very sincerely devoted to my child, and it weighs with me—it weighs with me," he exclaimed with a heavy sigh.

I stepped over to him and took his hand. "I am heartily obliged to you for your handsome words," I said. "I love your daughter truly, as she knows. Without her I dare not think how blank the world would be to me. I could not help loving her from the beginning, and I certainly will not now excuse myself for being audacious enough

to dream of her then; but for having given you offence in the past, I ask your pardon, Mr. Hawke."

"There is no need," he replied. "We did not know each other, and I will not say you had no right to resent my treatment. Mr. Seymour, my child is a precious trust—she is the only one remaining to me—you will be good to her and cherish her?"

"Do you give her to me?" I asked, half breathlessly.

He bowed his head. I looked from him to Aunt Damaris, and sprang to her side.

"Oh, Miss Hawke!" I cried deliriously, "is this due to your intercession? If so, may God bless you! may God bless you!"

"Mr. Jack," she cried, holding my hand and fondling it, "you deserve her. I have been thrown with you under strange circumstances, have seen your character, and I am grateful to think that Florence has found such a man for a husband. I told you I would conceal nothing from my brother. I have related everything to him—how you tricked me as Mr. Egerton, and what your behaviour has been as Jack Seymour. In what way but this should such an adventure as ours end? My brother has no other desire now than to see Florence happy; and with you she *will* be happy—she could be happy with nobody else—and Alphonso knows it."

I was turning to address him—to pour out in heaven alone knows what sort of English the delight with which my heart was overcharged—when Aunt Damaris most fortunately stopped me by rising.

“Alphonso,” said she, “Florence is all impatience to see her lover. Shall we go and send her to him?” He left his chair very quietly, and coming over to me offered his hand. I held it in silence, for there were tears in his eyes, and in the face of them I hardly knew what to say. He then went out of the room, followed by Aunt Damaris, who stood a moment in the door to look round and nod and smile at me and blow me a kiss with her old lean fingers.

I remained near one of the tables waiting, with my heart hammering in my breast till the clamour of it in my ears half stunned me. I was not long kept listening. The door was pushed open and my darling entered; a gleam of the afternoon sunshine streamed through the curtains in one of the western windows full on her; radiant it made her look despite the mourning in which she was clad; her bright hair shone with a golden tint, lovely was the deepening of the colour of her eyes by the soft warm blush on her cheeks; she lingered a moment or two with drooping head, peeping at me through her lashes with a timid smile. But what was the good of hanging in the

wind, mates? She was mine—she knew it; and when I held open my arms to her she fled to me and in a breath I had her heart against mine and my lips upon hers.

“This is the end of our shipwreck, Jack,” said she when I let her speak.

“Ay, my darling, my pet, my love!” I cried; “the end of our shipwreck, and the very last passage of Jack’s Courtship.”

THE END.

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